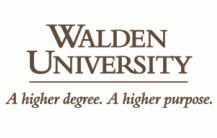

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The Effects of Education Narratives on High School Persistence among Navajo Girls

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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MA, American Military University, 2011

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Dropout rates among American Indian students have not shown significant improvement since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. While extensive research exists on the dropout phenomenon, no studies were found that addressed why some Navajo girls leave school and the role education narratives play in their decision. Accordingly, this study examined the narratives shaping federal and Navajo education policies in order to understand how these influence school programs. The research questions dealt with three elements that could induce Navajo girls to leave school, the institutions and programs offered by federal and tribal government entities, and the dichotomies between school and home environments. The narrative policy analysis, grounded in social construction theory, included provisional and secondary coding of the NCLB of 2001 and the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005. Interviews with administrators from the Department of Diné Education, and a young Navajo woman who had left school, supplemented the documentary analysis. The data were triangulated and a modified network analysis conducted to glean areas of convergence and discrepancy between federal and Navajo policy constructs, based on problem statements and proposed solutions. Results indicated that school programs aligned with federal imperatives might not engage or interest many Navajo girls, leading them to abandon their studies early. The implications for social change include the need to develop programs that increase self-direction and engagement among Navajo girls, and granting indigenous peoples autonomy in deciding which educational approaches most closely align with their cultural norms and long-term objectives.

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Dedication

This dissertation is an act of love dedicated to my three children, whose courage, grace, resolve, and vision have helped them overcome the numerous obstacles they have confronted in life, resulting in strong, independent, and compassionate human beings. In addition, I honor my mother and four sisters for the many ways in which they model intellectual curiosity, empathy, and integrity in their endeavors. Finally, I pay tribute to all the courageous and talented women and girls of the world, who have struggled against at times insurmountable odds to achieve equality, good educations, and a world free from violence and discrimination. Among these are the beautiful, gracious, and powerful women of the Navajo Nation, who never cease to amaze and inspire me.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

An idealistic view of education is the pursuit of knowledge to better understand a complex and rapidly changing world. Most nations deem education a human right and perceive it to be the best pathway out of poverty and its concomitant difficulties (Hillman & Jenkner, 2004, para. 4; "The Universal Declaration," 1948). In the United States, citizens can receive a free public education for 12 years (Spellings, 2005), with the implied equal access and positive outcomes outlined in the U.S. Department of Education's mission statement (U.S. Department of Education, 2014, para. 1). The stated goals of promoting access to education and a high-quality education for all suggest an impartial system serving every student equally; decentralized authority and disparate funding structures, however, often result in unequal access to first-rate programs for many, notably students belonging to minority and specific socioeconomic groups, including American Indians and Alaska Natives (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, & Kuscera, 2014).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was designed to counteract inevitable disparities by requiring that states develop curriculum standards, that teachers meet minimum education and experience levels, and that standardized tests be administered to measure the degree to which students were meeting predetermined proficiency levels (NCLB, 2002). The intent was to increase school accountability and ensure appropriate interventions for low-performing institutions, and by these measures, establish minimum standards for all publicly funded institutions. As Jahng (2011) has

argued, however, NCLB simultaneously provides minority children what they most require, including a quality education and pathways to equal opportunity and self-determination, while depriving them of many opportunities to avail themselves of these benefits. Standardizing instruction and testing minimize the influence of cultural differences, learning styles, and linguistic backgrounds, while classifying these dissimilarities as deviant from the norm and needing remediation (Jahng, 2011). The approaches favored by NCLB have not established unequivocal improvements in achievement among students, when measured with standardized tests. As an example, Lee and Reeves' (2012) comparative study of 1999-2009 pre- and post-NCLB test scores in reading and math for 4th grade students revealed persistent unresolved achievement gaps. Analysis of the results indicated some progress in math proficiency, but reading scores were mixed, even though states have made considerable investments in their reading programs, while doing comparatively little to alter their math instruction strategies (Lee & Reeves, 2012).

The lackluster scores suggest that the approaches mandated by NCLB are not as effective in resolving low student performance as policymakers had projected, and raise questions about the policy's effectiveness in addressing deep-seated inequality issues, such as those caused by socioeconomic status, geographical location, or cultural heritage. A 2009 National Indian Education Study revealed unrelenting achievement gaps between Native students and their White peers, with only 21% of Native? 8th graders close to or above proficiency (National Assessment of Educational Progress [NAEP], 2010, p. 1). While these studies compare groups of students to determine quantitatively the

consequences of policy decisions, they offer little insight into the struggles confronted by individual adolescents endeavoring to acquire an education that can provide access to adequate employment and enhance their control over the circumstances in which they live. That many abandon this undertaking before completion might indicate a systemic failure to provide the structure and adaptability necessary to serve a diverse population and offer an equitable path to full citizenship.

The Dropout Phenomenon

Official figures report that the percentage of students graduating from high school has risen slightly since 2011, although minority graduation rates remain below 75% (Stetser & Stillwell, 2014). The data offers a limited view of the problem, however, since it relies on aggregated numbers from individual districts whose reporting methods vary; different computational methods show a negative variance close to 25% from official records of minority dropouts (Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004). The discrepancy is particularly evident among American Indian and Alaska Native students, whose mobility, distribution, residential status, and enrollment in BIE schools makes them particularly difficult to count accurately. Faircloth and Tippeconnic III (2010) have calculated an average graduation rate of 47% among this demographic. This study focused specifically on female students residing in the Navajo Nation who have withdrawn from school prior to graduating, and investigated the influence NCLB mandates may have had on their decision. In addition, the study will explore the efforts of the Navajo Nation to provide these girls with a modern, effective, and appropriate education.

The Navajo Nation stretches across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, and encompasses school districts from each of these states. Graduation and dropout rates for these three states cluster students by race, but do not disaggregate by gender. In Arizona, the averaged 2013 4-year cohort graduation rate for students within the borders of the Navajo reservation was 60%, approximately the same as the state average of 61% for all American Indian and Alaska Native students, but far below the 83% state average reported for White students (see Appendix A; Arizona Department of Education, 2014). In New Mexico, the averaged 2013 cohort graduation for students on the Navajo reservation was 74%, in comparison to the 64.3% for all Native American students in the state, and 77% for White students (see Appendix B; New Mexico Public Education Department, 2014). Finally, the state of Utah, which hosts only a small portion of the Navajo reservation, had a cohort graduation rate for 2013 of 65% for all American Indian students within the state (Utah State Office of Education, 2013). The averaged Utah 2013 cohort rate of Navajo students attending high school within the borders of the Navajo Nation was 76%, while the graduation rate for Whites during the same year was 85% (see Appendix C; Utah State Office of Education, 2013).

Graduation data for Navajo students attending public schools within the borders of the Nation, gleaned from official state 4-year cohort reports, suggest that while more students are earning diplomas on the reservation than off the reservation, their numbers are still distressingly low (Table 1). The reports do not account for other important variables such as isolation, poverty, and potential obstacles to full participation, making causality difficult to determine with any degree of accuracy.

Table 1

2013 Four-year Cohort Graduation Rates by State

Demographic	Arizona	New Mexico	Utah
American Indian	.61	.64	.65
Navajo	.65	.74	.76
White	.83	.77	.85

Note. Adapted from "*Cohort 2013 four year graduate rate data,"* Arizona Department of Education (2014). Retrieved from http://www.azed.gov/research-evaluation/graduation-rates/; "*4-year graduation rate cohorts of 2013,"*New Mexico Public Education Department (2014). Retrieved from http://ped. state.nm. us./ped/graduation_data.html; "*2013 Cohort graduation and dropout rate report,"* Utah State Office of Education (2013). Retrieved from http://www.schools.utah.gov/data/reports/Graduation-Dropout/ ByDistrictSchool2013.aspx

A number of aspects complicate the picture of Indian education in the southwest. The Department of the Interior operates Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools, but requires that they conform to the same NCLB standards as the states where these institutions are located. More than half of BIE schools are tribally controlled under the PL 100-297 Tribally Controlled Schools Act, or 93-638 Indian Self-Determination Contracts (H.R. Res. 93-638, 1975; H.R. Res. 100-297, 1988). While the policies appear to offer a level of autonomy to the tribes operating these schools, they have not resulted in appreciably higher graduation rates. A 2013 Government Accounting Office (GAO) report concluded that BIE schools graduate fewer students than do most states hosting them; in 2013, BIE schools reported a graduation rate of only 61% (GAO, 2013, p. 10). While this number is just slightly lower than that of Arizona public schools (62%), it is considerably higher than New Mexico (56%) or Utah (57%) graduation rates for the same year. The report also suggested that BIE administrative failures have exacerbated the

bleak graduation picture due to lack of coordination and communication, and an absence of clear goals and objectives (GAO, 2013). Within the Navajo Nation, which hosts not only public schools from three states, but also federal and private institutions, a fragmented system inhibits the tribe's ability to restructure and coordinate programs and assessment protocols (*Hearing on Education*, 2014).

Withdrawing from school prior to completion is universally problematic; in undeveloped countries, the secondary dropout rate remains close to 45%, while wealthier nations wrestle with higher-than-desired averages between 15% and 25% (UNESCO, 2014). The parallels between school non-persistency among American Indian students and adolescents in undeveloped nations suggests a divergence between stated educational goals and real outcomes in the United States; this calls for solutions that address specific causal factors. Dewey (1916) proposed that the purpose of public education is to ensure the continuance of inclusive participatory democracy. This would grant equal power to every participant, suggesting that the progress of the collective and individuals would depend on good universal education (Dewey, 1916). Schooling, according to this philosophy, is a primary means for achieving equity, autonomy, and self-determination—concepts deeply rooted in democratic ideals. Contemporary discourses on education in the United States, however, overwhelmingly promote notions of worker productivity and economic competitiveness, inviting critiques that public schools promote consumerism, and that implicit messages of cultural dominance and neoliberalism permeate curricula and pedagogies (Martinez, 2010; Sandlin, Burdick, & Norris, 2012). These contrasts between idealist and pragmatic perceptions of education might provide insight as to why

some would leave an environment where they are disadvantaged by virtue of their minority status or nonconformity with mainstream cultural norms.

Research on the causes, remediation, and prevention of the dropout phenomenon is extensive; it addresses educational environments, socioeconomic status, gender differentiation, racial and cultural discrimination, geographical location, native versus immigrant status, disability, and parental socialization practices (Battin-Pearson et al., 2000; Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012; Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). Some studies have sought to determine consistent predictors and categorize potential dropouts by subgroup (Bowers, Sprott, & Taff, 2012; Bowers & Sprott, 2012). Using a meta-analysis of studies examining variables that can influence a decision to leave school, Bowers, Sprott, and Taff (2012) proposed that longitudinal indicators of a student's interest in school and academic focus are the most accurate ways to determine the likelihood of eventual dropout (p. 12). A significant correlation exists between making a student repeat a grade and a decision to drop out. While not all have experienced retention, Bowers et al. (2012) suggested that most individuals who have, in due course withdraw from school. This correspondence indicates that retention could serve as a flag to monitor a student's progress over time, in order to activate appropriate interventions.

While this study suggests that low and failing grades are indicators of potential dropout, it seems prudent to interpret the correlation cautiously, as grading is a subjective, arbitrary exercise, and scoring can be more reflective of the system than the student's engagement or ability. In other words, dropping out can result from being inadvertently pushed out, as opposed to leaving voluntarily due to personally

insurmountable academic obstacles. Native students might confront this type of situation when enrolled in culturally homogeneous schools where they are vastly outnumbered, or where either the setting or course offerings are misaligned with their needs and priorities. Other factors potentially contributing to pushing students out of school include over-diagnosis of learning disabilities due to a lack of familiarity with culturally influenced behaviors; Robinson-Zanartu et al. (2011) cautioned that cultural competence training for staff might not be providing adequate tools to diagnose and make available appropriate interventions for students with legitimate needs.

The concern engendered by the excessive number of dropouts among minority students has resulted in studies exploring the circumstances specific to their schooling experiences, including setting and daily interactions, as well as implicit messages these might transmit. Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological systems theory (EST) addresses the influence of context on behaviors and choices, and includes a number of interwoven systems that could interact synergistically with the persona at different levels of intensity. The *microsystem* includes the immediate setting, consisting of interpersonal interactions and those places within which individuals live and operate (p. 514). Davison and Hawe (2012), using an activity settings framework as a possible microsystem, explored the degree to which physical setting affects Native student outcomes. Included were such features as a school's investment in providing a safe and supportive environment, schedule structures, and the degree of community involvement, based on such elements as distance from the institution. Student engagement is sensitive to numerous aspects within the school setting, including the way activities are structured, family and

community participation in the school experience, disciplinary policies, efforts to respond to student cultural distinctness, and the level of connectedness between community and institution (Davison & Hawe, 2012). Perceived hostility of administrative staff and teacher indifference corrode feelings of safety or engagement among Native students. These students are keenly aware of institutional practices based on assumptions of their inability to function within the school environment and harsh disciplinary measures (Cerecer, 2013).

The connection between poverty and premature withdrawal from school has unpredictable implications. Freudenberg and Ruglis (2007) studied the correlation between socioeconomic status (SES) and school persistency, and suggested that the high number of dropouts in the United States constitutes a real threat to public health. American Indian families rank among the poorest in the United States, with 30% living on annual incomes below $23,500—the poverty level for a family of four (U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, 2014). The median income for all Native Americans averages 30% less than that of White households (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011; Macartney, Bishaw, & Fontenot, 2013). On the Navajo reservation, 43% of children under the age of 18 live in poverty (Arizona Rural Policy Institute, n. d.). Duchesne, Vitaro, Larose, and Tremblay (2008) found a significant correlation between the anxiety caused by difficult living circumstances, such as poverty or familial discord, and early withdrawal from school. Wang, Willett, and Eccles (2011) also detected a distinct association between apprehension and a student's ability or willingness to engage in school activities, as well as their levels of trust and sense of mutuality. This suggests that difficult personal

circumstances can affect a student's ability to engage in learning, possibly negating the positive aspects of a school's supportive structures. These studies provide a level of insight into some important reasons for academic nonpersistence among Native students, even those attending tribal schools with favorable and homogenous environments. The barriers to learning and participation created by extreme poverty might outweigh the incentive of obtaining a high school diploma.

Resilience, defined as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress" (American Psychological Association, 2014, p. 2), can serve as a measure with which to assess a student's academic functioning when managing difficult circumstances, whether attributable to socio-economic, personal, or cultural factors. The 2014 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) report explained that a supportive communal web—whether local, state, or international—enables resilience (p. 7). Reducing vulnerability enhances resilience, suggesting the need for government policies specifically designed for crisis prevention (p. 8). Brokenleg (2012) noted that the Native American population is comparatively young, averaging 16 years of age (p. 9). The additional vulnerability of youth, exacerbated by poverty, is thus a critical issue confronted by these groups, who Brokenleg described as enduring the legacy of their progenitors' suffering under colonialist assaults against their culture and way of life (p. 10).

Schools that intentionally engage in resilience-building activities—including implementing culturally sensitive pedagogies, encouraging partnerships between schools and communities, and developing outreach programs—appear to enhance Native

American student achievement (Beaulieu, 2006; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Thornton & Sanchez, 2010). Fenimore-Smith's (2009) observation of a tribal charter school offering a culturally centered program suggested that Indigenous schools succeed when they do not teach Native cultural values framed in Western constructs, as supplements to the regular curriculum, but instead center their pedagogies on Native epistemologies, thus conjoining academics and culture and showing their compatibility. Demmert's (2011) review of demonstration projects using culturally based pedagogies included recommendations that communities participate in developing programs, that assessments be sensitive to cultural modalities, and that teacher training take place in partnership with colleges and universities, to ensure the inclusion of cultural sensitivity preparation. Fryberg et al. (2013) suggested that the profound cultural misalignment between Aboriginal and mainstream American cultures creates obstacles to academic success for those Native students who do not manifest traits valued in western culture, especially assertiveness, which western epistemologies perceive as a necessary trait for academic achievement. One recommendation is that teachers receive training in culturally distinct differences in self-expression, using these broader criteria for student assessment (Fryberg et al., 2013). Perhaps the most critical step would be to recruit Native teachers, and invite their contributions to developing curricula for schools serving Native populations.

After performing a controlled study of the effects of culturally based instruction in math, science and technology, the Navajo Nation Rural Systemic Initiative concluded that "culturally infused, standards-based education represented an effective school improvement strategy for Navajo schools and children" (*Navajo Nation*, 2011, p. 9).

These studies reflect the positive results of deliberative approaches to enhancing students' self-esteem and self-efficacy, thus strengthening students' resilience when encountering adversity, and the need to examine educational policies to assess whether they address these aspects. The dropout phenomenon, whether at the local, national, or international level, is of such complexity that universally applicable solutions are doubtful, leaving local stakeholders as the most likely to develop effective strategies to address their unique circumstances and needs.

Educating Girls

According to Greenberger et al. (2007), the emphasis on ensuring that girls completed at least secondary education is mounting as research continues to reveal an important correlation between women's educational levels and their family's health and economic well-being. The potential consequences of dropping out for girls in the United States include a 50% unemployment rate, low wages, and greater vulnerability to chronic illness accompanied by reduced access to adequate medical services. Additionally, leaving school prematurely promotes generational educational underachievement, as the children of dropouts appear to be less likely to complete their own education . While the overall number of American Indian students leaving their studies prematurely has been researched (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010; Stetser & Stillwell, 2014), there remains a sizable gap in determining the factors leading to their eventual withdrawal. This is especially true when considering Native American girls.

The critical importance of educating girls is an international priority. Since 2000, the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) has focused on guiding and

supporting government efforts to provide educational opportunities for girls and reduce cultural or fiscal obstacles that interfere with open access to schooling (United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, 2008). The fate of Native American girls in the United States, however, has remained obscured by an absence of research to determine the effects of environment, social constructs, and policies on their ability or desire to complete their education. While official statistics compiled by state and federal government entities suggest the existence of a problem, the general nature of the data provides little insight into social determinants. Hunt (2008) noted the absence of research on the processes of dropping out:

> If dropout is viewed as a process, then children's stories around dropping out from school emerge not in isolation, but as a series of decisions, events, and interactions that lead in a certain direction. While each story is different, research would show how they are different and whether patterns around the processes of exclusion can be identified within certain contexts…. If processes are known, then critical intervention points can be identified before drop out occurs. (p. 51)

It is not enough to note that a great number of American Indian girls leave school prematurely, or to comment on the likely consequences of this choice. For change to occur, it is crucial to understand why this is happening, including the possible contribution of policy-level decisions that determine programmatic choices, pedagogies, and school environments, and how these interact with individual cultural, social, and personal constructs. Recognizing the girls' perspectives is the first step in developing effective solutions.

Navajo Girls

The 2010 census of the Navajo Nation showed a median age of 30 for females, and that 38% of the total female population was between the ages of 10 and 19 (Arizona Rural Policy Institute, n. d.). In addition, 26% of women were single heads of household, and 12% of these had children under the age of 18 (p. 21). These numbers imply a young population and support the imperative of education persistence. Beyond this evident conclusion, however, lie complex cultural and social dynamics that influence self-definitions and personal imperatives, including whether or not to pursue a career, as well as the type of occupation sought. Evans and Diekman (2009) found a distinct congruity between culturally determined gender roles and an individual's personal goals and career selection. This suggests the need to understand how culture might influence educational pathways chosen by individual girls. The roles women play in Navajo culture might affect the decisions they make about education, which implies a need to explore the interplay between personal goal setting, education, and social roles for Navajo girls. Without understanding the values that direct the choices these students make about their education, schools cannot hope to develop appropriate programs to meet their needs and enhance retention.

Problem Statement

Government policies espouse the goal of providing all American citizens with equal access to good education, and include aspects designed to provide American Indian tribes with authority to develop programs that reflect their unique cultural values and imperatives (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). The language of the NCLB (2001)

frames a set of assumptions that underlie the way education policies are written and funds allocated at the federal and state levels. These assumptions, reflecting Western cultural values and priorities based on predominant social and economic models, include the level to which government is responsible for determining the directionality and quality of state programs, as well as acceptable measures of achievement (NCLB, 2001, Sec. 1001; Winstead, Lawrence, Brantmeier, & Frey, 2008).

The Department of Interior, which guides the implementation of NCLB policies for Native tribes through the BIE), has developed some strategies for improving achievement and graduation rates in BIE schools. The *Blueprint for Reform* issued in June 2014 described an evolution in BIE mandates from simply operating schools, to providing tribes with guidance and expert support services, as well as facilitating communication and sharing between all BIE institutions (*Findings and Recommendations*, 2014, p. 2). One of the priorities listed is to encourage autonomy among Native tribes (p. 12); it is notable that the BIE defines high-achieving schools as those conforming to Common Core State Standards and assessments (p. 11). In addition, the BIE has framed its recommendations for increasing tribal control within the specific parameters of fund management, offering guidelines on allowable levels of discretion in teaching Native language and culture, and technical assistance for aligning Native culture and language instruction with Common Core standards. The concurrent recommendation to provide all BIE schools with broadband internet and adequate computer hardware, in part so that they can administer standardized tests multiple times annually (p. 22), speaks to the federal government's commitment to preserving NCLB mandates in schools it

funds. By contrast, the Navajo Nation submitted an alternative plan for instruction and assessment in 2011, including incremental implementation of standards based upon tribal definitions of an appropriate education for Navajo students. This plan was centered on the assertion that NCLB offers Indian tribes the option of developing their own definitions of adequate yearly progress (*Navajo Nation*, 2011). These divergent efforts illustrate the persistent dilemma of differing definitions of sovereignty and educational objectives and outcomes—a discrepancy with serious consequences for Native families seeking to provide their children with an effective, pertinent education and equal opportunities to access a college education.

The question of how to provide appropriate instructional environments for Native children has propelled research into the detrimental factors that could affect academic success, including organizing instruction around compliance with state-mandated testing, and supporting neoliberal structures of power that retain the economic status quo where minority populations have restricted access to high paying careers (Martinez, 2010). Other studies have examined the effects of unsafe learning environments (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010), and ineffective teacher training for implementing bicultural curricula (Cherubini, 2011). Inquiries into successful instructional approaches for Indigenous youth, including small-group learning, establishing trusting relationships with teachers, and integrating culturally relevant pedagogies, have provided data that can redirect methodologies (Bang & Medin, 2010; Carjuzaa & Ruff, 2010; Carjuzaa, 2012; Hirtle, 2011; Nam, Roehrig, Kern, & Reynolds, 2013; Whitinui, 2010). In addition, research examining the use of a minority group's heritage language as a primary means

of instruction, or establishing a vibrant Native language component in schools, has demonstrated the value of these approaches in supporting academic achievement (Hinton, 2011; McCarty, 2011). Alternatively, however, there is little research on how Indigenous children navigate the tasks of acquiring two languages simultaneously in home and academic environments, or strategies for supporting these dynamics (Ball, 2009).

Negative correlations between anticipated standardized test scores using NCLB-mandated methodologies and actual results among Indigenous students are an ongoing topic of inquiry. There is little research, however, on how social constructions of the meaning and purpose of education might inadvertently affect student motivation and achievement. Policy makers, wishing to oversee programs that provide desired student outcomes, must examine not only fiscal cost-benefit ratios and idealistic projections of national technological and economic competitiveness, but also the way programs can influence individual perceptions of the value of education and the motivation to persist until graduation.

Research on best practices for inspiring students to persevere and graduate offers some insight into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, including developing teacher-student relationships, reward systems other than grades, and providing rich learning environments (Wentzel & Brophy, 2013). Williams and Williams (2011) conducted an inquiry into student motivation and suggested that the interplay of factors is so complex, that while developing specific strategies is difficult, awareness of the elements of incentive can help schools create effective approaches to improve outcomes. The manner in which schools present education can affect the desire to attend classes and learn;

Williams and Williams argued that students are part of a complex synergetic process where physical and social environments, needs, and personal backgrounds interact with content and process, influencing incentives to study. Additionally, sense of purpose and personal vision are essential aspects of desire and perseverance; there is little incentive to continue engaging in a process if the outcome seems unattainable or irrelevant (Williams & Williams, 2011).

It is important to understand the relationship between these aspects of student motivation and those influenced by the narratives of the dominant culture, especially if they promote education as having a particular goal. While the research literature touches on these aspects in a general sense, there is little that specifically addresses motivational factors for Native girls, nor any focusing on Navajo girls. With no clear understanding of how, or even whether, these adolescents perceive themselves as stakeholders in the educational process, or the way prevailing narratives of the purpose of education influence student outcomes, it will be difficult or impossible to resolve the obstacles these young women confront.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the differences between the narratives of the federal government and the Navajo tribe on the purpose and direction of education, and seek to understand how these affect the academic journeys of Navajo girls, specifically their decisions to leave school before graduating. This was a narrative policy analysis based on a narrative inquiry centered within the experiences of a young Navajo woman who had attended high school within the borders of the Navajo

Nation but did not complete her studies before dropping out. The analysis encompassed three distinct narrative strands—that of the federal government, the Navajo tribe's department of education, and of the individual. Each strand included underlying cultural values and assumptions about education, in an effort to develop strategies that could address the needs of each contingent and provide data that can support efforts to develop strong educational programs for Navajo girls.

Guiding Questions

The goal of this study was to understand the forces that either push or pull Navajo girls out of the academic setting they have known since early childhood, and how these influence a decision to remain in, or withdraw from, high school. To this end, the guiding question asked:

> What elements contributed to the decision of a Navajo girl attending public high school within the Navajo Nation to withdraw before graduating?

In order to examine the complex nature of these dynamics and place them in the context of family, community, and culture, two subquestions were posed:

1. How does this Navajo girl portray the institutional environment of the schools she attended and its correspondence with her home and cultural settings?

SQ2 was directed toward her perceptions of the school's efforts to provide supportive programs and appropriate curricula:

2. How does this girl depict the programs offered, and their application to her everyday life?

Focusing on how social constructions of the meanings and purpose of education affect the way policymakers direct program funding and development, and eventually frame high school environments for Navajo girls, SQ3 asked,

3. What narratives inform federal and Navajo educational policies and how do they shape the programs at the schools the girl attended?

Conceptual Framework

Social construction of reality theory focuses upon the manner in which groups formulate responses to their environment and share knowledge, transmitting common understandings in such a manner as to ensure their persistence and support the group's endurance as a cohesive unit (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Language and symbols are the primary means of transmission, supplying members of the group with a conceptual basis from which to develop individual constructs, along with a foundation of traditions developed over time (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Social constructionism provides an especially useful instrument for understanding the cultural, social, and individual imperatives that form the basis for the narratives of not only Navajo girls who have left school, but also those of government entities, whether federal or tribal, whose policies shape the educational environment.

In Chapter 2 I provide a detailed explanation of social constructionism and its relationship to ideology, which has historically framed the discourse on education for Native Americans, and still directs policy formulation in the 21st century. In addition, the chapter discusses how the social construction of specific groups, such as minorities and those in particular socioeconomic groups, influences discourse about their deservedness

and the degree to which programs intended to benefit them are promoted and funded (Ingram, Schneider, & DeLeon, 1999). This relates directly to the concept of Congressional plenary powers, tribal sovereignty, the latitude given tribes to direct their own educational programs, and the way funding is provided.

Constructivism provided the conceptual framework for this study, which sought to determine whether dominant discourses on education have helped shape the perceptions of adolescent Navajo girls, and whether these have had any influence on their decision to leave school. Constructivist theory proposes that experience shapes understanding, and that interactions with the environment are irrevocably synergetic, and as such influence the meaning making process (Burr, 2007; Glasersfeld, 2005). This suggests that reality is actually a subjective interpretation of experience, and as such limited by the nature of the contact that takes place, as well as the individual making meaning from this interaction.

Constructivism also distinguishes objective from subjective reality, affirming that knowing is not an end-state but a progression through stages, and while perceptions are authentic, they are not a substitute for the objective reality shared by all (Piaget, 1970, as cited in Le Moigne, 2011, p. 153). Glasersfeld (1981) posited that individual realities are unique inasmuch as they are private organizations of data based on perceptual capacity and inclination; this implies that knowing is fundamentally a personal point of view, and while collective knowledge has many commonalities and shared assumptions, it does not replicate exactly from one person to the next. Patton (2002) refined this argument by adding that while perceptions and definitions of reality might be unique to each

individual, these nevertheless are very real and constitute authentic parameters that they must constantly adapt to newly acquired information. Constructivism supported the study methodologies with an approach that asked the participant to contribute her individual perceptions of her schooling experience in an interview format, and provided an opportunity for school administrators to explain Navajo educational narratives and frameworks.

A section in Chapter 2 on the growing realization of the importance of ethnic identity development in children and its relationship with self-esteem and academic achievement provides data for the burgeoning discourse on culturally relevant pedagogies and shifting definitions of appropriate school settings for Native children. This inquiry wove these strands into a coherent and meaningful discussion of the way social constructions of education, as well as cultural and social positioning, influence individual interpretations of reality and self within the decision making process for Navajo girls.

Nature of the Study

This qualitative study was supported by documentary evidence, interviews, and a narrative inquiry. Narrative policy analysis (NPA) bases its findings on the retelling and analysis of accounts that shape policy development, and relating the stories of those experiencing the effects of these policies (Roe, 1994). The purpose guiding NPA is to understand the synergy between conflicting narratives, and how this dynamic can serve to undermine policy development or administration (Roe, 1994). Additionally, acknowledging the complexity of assumptions underlying the policy-writing process can promote a better understanding of outcomes, especially when groups that do not share

these ideas are expected to comply with the mandates. One of the goals of this study was to distinguish and analyze those aspects of federal and tribal policy that could be labeled *stories, non-stories,* and *counterstories* (p. 3) in an effort to understand how these may have contributed to the difficulties experienced by Navajo girls seeking to pursue an education. Stories are the narratives, whether based on social or cultural norms, which support a given policy's directives, whereas non-stories and counterstories conflict with the assumptions underlying the policy (p. 3). In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed explanation of NPA within the context of this study.

The qualitative approach to research has some distinct advantages for those seeking to comprehend nuances in human understanding or the way environmental factors can affect an individual's perceptions and decisions. Qualitative methodologies are holistic, contextual, and provide insights not achievable when relying solely on quantitative data (Creswell, 2013; Janescik, 2011, Patton, 2002). The conceptual basis for qualitative inquiry lies in the German term *verstehen* meaning, "to interpret," which describes the effects of context on perceptions (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012, p. 6). This interpretive description offers unique insights into human behavior and choice, but can also be subjective, thus arguably relativistic, and its conclusions difficult to generalize (p. 7).

While offering opportunities to explore complex data and clarify ambiguity, qualitative approaches have distinct limitations. The most significant constraints include the need to establish methods to prevent biased data collection and interpretation, and the difficulty of establishing the absence of interviewer influence on participants' responses

(Creswell, 2013; Lapan & Quartaroli, 2012). In addition to these important aspects, qualitative research is generally limited in scope, due to the difficulty and cost involved in large-scale studies involving interviews and personal interactions. Patton (2002) noted the importance of clarifying the context of an inquiry and its consequent restrictions (p. 563). The limited number of participants and the criterion sampling approach also made the study more difficult to generalize over a large population. In this case, the results are not transferrable to other populations of female American Indian students due to the unique nature of tribal cultures and individual circumstances. This study's delimitations include the selection of two communities within the borders of the Navajo nation, a small number of representative purposefully selected participants, and evidence limited to its relevance to NCLB mandates and Navajo definitions of appropriate educational standards and measures.

This study originally planned to use a collective case study model and a number of individually described cases to illustrate the single issue of Navajo girls withdrawing early from high school (Creswell, 2013). The multiple case study approach would have provided depth to the inquiry, inasmuch as the issue is multidimensional and inevitably influenced by factors such as personality, family, and socioeconomic circumstances. The difficulty of recruiting willing participants, however, created the need to change the format to a narrative inquiry exploring the experience of a single girl whose life circumstances led her to drop out of high school. The sites from which I recruited included two communities within the Navajo Nation that host relatively large public high schools (over 900 students). Each of these institutions pulls students from a wide rural

area and diverse communities; most students have significant commutes to and from school.

Interviews provided the primary data for this study. I used Rubin and Rubin's (2012) responsive interviewing approach, which focuses upon building a trusting relationship within which an open conversation can take place, and creating a horizontal, reciprocally beneficial dynamic (p. 7). While useful for gleaning important information about individual perceptions and experiences, interviews are generally insufficient evidence since they only provide one perspective (Yin, 2014). A comprehensive inquiry thus call for supplemental information, including documents and artifacts to support data offered by participants and strengthen the case study's validity (Yin, 2014). In addition to the participant's story and experiences, I gathered primary documents related to the standards developed by the Department of Diné Education (DODE) and the outcomes it seeks to fulfill through its programs and curricula. Interviewing administrative staff at the DODE provided data for the narrative strand representing the stance of the Navajo Nation on appropriate pedagogies and assessments.

Definitions

American Indian, Native American, *Native*, *Aboriginal,* and Indigenous describe the modern descendants of those peoples who inhabited the North American continent prior to the advent of European colonization. Even though these terms appear to homogenize (Smith, 2012, p. 6) and overlook the unique characteristics of distinct groups and cultures, their function is for general reference, not to define a specific group or culture. Smith (2012) noted that the term *indigenous peoples* as a collective term

internationalizes the struggles of populations historically subjected to colonization, and as such is acceptable to advocates of self-determination and decolonization. However, colonizers seeking to distinguish themselves from new immigrants and attempting to establish prior claim on settled land (p. 7) have also adopted the word *indigenous* and thus shifted the meaning in some contexts. Recognizing these distinctions, I have selected to follow Margaret Kovach's (2009) example and capitalize the words *Indigenous* and *Aboriginal* to separate the collective meaning from that which refers specifically to North American Native tribes and peoples.

Counter-narratives delineate a position questioning the assumptions underlying dominant narratives, and offer an alternate perspective (Bamberg, 2004). Bamberg (2004) explained that primary narratives often find their basis within commonly accepted frameworks and cultural norms. While counter-narratives may oppose the constructs of these narratives, the differences may be subtle and based on different degrees of divergence (Bamberg, 2004).

Culturally relevant education refers to curricula and pedagogies that recognize, and may utilize, culturally unique epistemologies and methodologies for instruction, in an effort to support academic achievement among minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Paris (2012) distinguishes this approach from "culturally sustaining pedagogies" which would support pluralistic instruction emphasizing natal cultures and languages as equivalent in importance to those of the dominant culture (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Gatekeepers are those individuals whose familiarity with the setting, people, and language of a community, provides avenues for access when seeking entry and contact

within. Gatekeepers in the context of this study are Navajo individuals approved by the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board whose role is to ensure that the study meet NNHRRB criteria, assist in contacting key individuals for the study including families and school administrators, and provide a cultural and linguistic bridge between the researcher and the participants.

Linguistic genocide is the systematic and deliberate annihilation of Indigenous peoples' heritage language, as exemplified by placing Native children in boarding schools, and punishing them for speaking their native tongue (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) used the expression to signify "(actively) killing the language without killing the speakers (as in physical genocide), or (through passivity) letting the language die" (p. 312).

Native American Languages Act of 1990 declared Congressional recognition that the American Indian peoples have the right to use, teach, and conduct business in their respective heritage languages, that studies have demonstrated a clear correlation between student success and " respect for, and support of the first language of the child or student" (Sec. 102). In addition, the act established the right of Native tribes to develop educational programs based on using their heritage language (Sec. 104).

Navajo, used in mainstream discourse and throughout this study, references individual and collective members of the Navajo tribe and citizens of the Navajo Nation. *Navajo* and *Diné* are at times transposed, but do not share the same meaning or connotations. Matt (2011) noted that the word *Diné*, meaning *the people,* is the preferred self-referent (p. 10).

Assumptions

This study investigated possible correlations between policy frameworks, social constructions of education, and academic performance and persistence for American Indian girls. The primary assumption in the study was that political discourse directly and indirectly affects educational environments, and as such, will influence the level to which American Indian girls engage in earning a high school diploma. The first aspect addresses the premise that federal definitions of education focus on developing economically productive graduates who are fluent in English and technologically competent, and that measurements of success center on achieving high scores on standardized tests. The second piece centers on the premise that when Native American tribes freely exercise their sovereignty in educational matters, and can choose alternate approaches and outcomes for their children, a different set of measures of success might emerge that could influence student engagement and persistence. The aim of this inquiry was to understand how differing political and social constructions of the meaning and purpose of education could affect adolescent girls as they select life pathways and develop their personas within their cultural contexts.

Scope and Delimitations

This study was limited in scope to the influence of the federal government and Department of Dine' Education on curricula, testing, and school environment, and the effects these have on Navajo girls' decisions to either remain or withdraw from school prior to graduating. I selected this focus because of my work within the Navajo Nation as a Special Education teacher. While performing the various duties included in managing

each assigned case, I frequently performed home visits, sometimes to remote areas where the lack of utilities and adequate transportation made evident the difficulties some of my students endured just to attend school. I developed positive, friendly, student–teacher relationships with several girls. As the school year progressed, however, some gradually became distanced from their academics and peers, until they eventually stopped coming to school altogether. One girl in particular attended classes once a week for several months and then disappeared. These experiences initiated a process of questioning the circumstances under which these girls left school, and a determination to understand the contributing factors that could influence their decision making process, especially those related to educational policies that direct program development, funding, and application.

This study was limited to Navajo girls, focusing on the dynamics confronting these girls as they participate in the process of obtaining an education in the United States. This does not diminish the importance of the difficulties confronting Navajo boys in the mainstream educational system, nor does it imply that these dynamics do not have analogous consequences on their decisions to leave school prior to graduating. The stories of these girls are important; as Hunt (2008) suggested, studies that base their findings on actual interactions with children who have left school, and which ask about their life stories and the processes that eventually lead to their dropping out, are rare, but essential if we are to understand how to reverse the trend (p. 51). It is expected that these data will be particularly useful for agencies developing programs designed to assist girls to remain in school; it should also provide crucial data for the Navajo Nation as it

implements culturally appropriate environments, objectives, and educational frameworks that align with their constructions of the direction and purpose of education.

Limitations

The primary limitations of the study included the cultural gap that exists between researcher and participant and the difficulty this creates in ensuring an accurate reflection of the participant's perspectives, as well as the manner in which the Navajo tribe perceives its role in determining how their children will be educated. Understanding the divide between Western and Indigenous narratives entails awareness of the presence of an imperialist lens that tends to impose interpretations based on Western solipsistic claims of validity, and instead create an environment that emphasizes equality and horizontality. Smith (2012) wrote that "The globalization of knowledge and Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge, the arbiter of what counts as knowledge, and the source of 'civilized" knowledge" (p. 66). This assumption creates a hierarchy between researcher and participants that can impede understanding. Instead, I invited the participant and tribal officials to contribute to the process of interpreting results in order to maximize accuracy. In addition, I openly placed myself within the study as an outsider whose experiences teaching Navajo children led her to ask why they left school, but who recognized that the only way to grasp the essence of the problem would be to present the perspective of those living within the experience.

In addition to the concern of bridging cultural divides, age and cultural divergences between myself and the participant engendered the need to openly address

these concerns at the very beginning of the interview process, and to enhance accuracy by developing questions that seek the same data but are worded differently (Koro-Ljungberg, Bussing, & Cornwell, 2010). Other limitations include the fact that the selected case does not sufficiently illustrate the complexity of the educational crisis confronting these girls; hence, the study is limited in significance and utility. Finally, the research only reflects the situation of one girl within a geographically limited region of the Navajo Nation. While this narrow scope limits transferability, it can provide a basis for further studies in different tribal settings that might suggest ways to address possible differences between mainstream and tribal imperatives in education, as well as the ways in which inter- and intracultural tensions can influence the desire and ability of girls to stay in school**.**

Significance of the Study

Definitions of education in the United States are undergoing dramatic transformations in the 21st century. According to The National Educational Technology Plan (2010), the new direction for learning is based on "state of the art technology…to enable, motivate, and inspire all students, regardless of background, languages, or disabilities," a path that assumes all students will have easy, regular access to the internet and the necessary tools, as well as the desire to master their use (U.S. Department of Education*,* 2010b, p. vi). This path finds its basis in the conceptualization of future graduates as "productive members of a globally competitive workforce" (p. vii), and that standardized assessments will supply the requisite data to guide the process of supporting students as they acquire the needed skills (p. vii). Success, as defined by Western

standards, eludes many Native American students, leading to questions about the suitability of educational environments and curricula focused solely on producing technologically competitive and productive workers (*Setting the pace,* 2014), since many of these goals are illusory for young people struggling with endemic poverty and geographic isolation.

The high number of dropouts recorded in the United States has not changed significantly since the institution of No Child Left Behind, nor has student achievement among Native American students shown a great deal of improvement (Garcia, 2008). This indicates a broad disparity between sought-after and achieved outcomes. An analysis of the narratives propelling policy development, and those of stakeholders whose children are affected by the policies, adds another dimension to the developing discourse on how best to educate children from different cultural backgrounds in the United States, and might provide insight into whether educating for employment is the sole legitimate objective. In addition, including the voices of Indigenous girls whose stories reflect their journey in the educational system and their eventual abandonment of this path, adds much-needed depth and context to the weaving of narratives that comprise the fabric of American educational policy. Policy analysis seeks to address potential and realized consequences, both intended and unintended, and diagnose possible changes to address these constructively (Bardach, 2012). Understanding the narratives underlying decisions can suggest alternatives to resolving existing problems by changing the originating dynamics.

Notably absent from the U.S. Department of Education's plan for transforming American educational settings into individually driven, technology-based programs, is any mention of diverse definitions, alternative goals and objectives, or cultural distinctness that might suggest differing approaches. This study, then, was designed to provide insight into the discrepancies between rhetoric and implementation of effective educational programs for American Indian students, and the effect this has on individual girls.

The study has implications for positive social change as the information could help create new discourse environments, where the evidence will provide grounds for exploring different options and solutions that reflect the needs of all stakeholders. Bryson (2011) noted that deliberation between groups invested in resolving problematic situations requires a "willingness on the part of would-be deliberators to: resist rushing to judgment, tolerate uncertainty, ambiguity, and equivocality; consider different views and new information, and be persuaded" (p. 9). Definitions of education as a human right must propel interchanges on purpose, setting, pedagogical methodologies, and assessments of success.

Summary

Democratic nations universally promote the concept that an educated citizenry is fundamental if self-determination and the protection of human rights are to endure. Beyond this idealistic notion, however, lie definitional dissimilarities as to the utility of education and the degree to which it should align with national or cultural priorities. Philosophers, such as Dewey (1916), asserted that the purpose of education is to promote

equity, but beyond that, to provide a setting within which individuals can develop the skills necessary to participate in decision-making processes that affect their well-being. Education is also perceived as more than the simple transmission of skills and society's aggregate of acquired knowledge; instead, as Jackson (2012) proposed, it can be considered a moral enterprise designed to improve the psychological and social wellbeing of its recipients (p. 60).

These appraisals of the significance of education clarify the emphasis the United State governments have come to ensure that schools provide environments, curricula, and programs designed to promote a high level of proficiency in all subjects. Accordingly, policymakers have developed and implemented legislation, such as the NCLB of 2002, which aspires to provide equal access to all American students, and has special provisions for disabled children, as well as those belonging to cultural and racial minority populations, including Native American. There exists, however, a considerable divergence between the projected and actual outcomes of these policies for these groups, especially in the areas of reading and math proficiency, standardized test scores, and high school graduation rates. The high school dropout rate for American Indian and Native Alaskan students averages between 25% and 50%, depending on the state within which the tribes are located (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010). Research into the causes of these high dropout rates has examined the effects of physical and social environments (Davison & Hawe, 2012), school programs, cultural discontinuity factors (Fryberg et al., 2013), the vestigial effects of colonial and assimilative practices (Smith, 1999), and the way second-language acquisition affects academic achievement (McCarty, 2011). While

no distinctive causative factors have been identified, some results indicate that better training for teachers who work in culturally distinct settings, implementing culturally aligned curricula, promoting the use of heritage languages in elementary schools, and allowing Native tribes to establish the basis for assessments could improve retention rates (*Navajo Nation*, 2011).

The United Nations promotes educating girls as one of its highest priorities inasmuch as leaving school prematurely can make it difficult to find adequate employment, resulting in increased poverty and poorer health outcomes for women and their families (Greenberger et al, 2007; United Nations, 2012). While government agencies in the United States report high dropout rates among Native American girls, there is little understanding of the factors that contribute to this crisis. This study focused on adolescent girls in the Navajo Nation who elected to withdraw from school, in an effort to understand the dynamics that have contributed to their decision and provide policymakers with much needed data.

The literature review in Chapter 2 of this study provides background in social construction of target groups, how it sometimes influences policy design and serves to perpetuate an asymmetrical status quo. The chapter also explores some of the complex relationship between sovereign tribal entities and the federal government, and provides important aspects of the history of Indian education. In addition, studies that question how the social construction of education in the United States might influence policy directives and programmatic choices provide additional clarity on the purpose of the 2002 NCLB and later federal directives. Finally, I present data that discusses possible

correlations between student achievement and Native language instruction in schools, culturally appropriate curricula, and ethnic identity. In Chapter 3, I explain the protocols followed to obtain permission from the Navajo Tribe to conduct the study, and the strategies used to analyze the documentary evidence and interview participants. Chapter 4 provides a detailed analysis of federal and Navajo policies, supplemented by material gleaned from interviews with DODE administrators and a Navajo girl who agreed to participate in the study. Finally, Chapter 5 contains a narrative policy analysis that offers some new areas of consideration for government agencies seeking to address high school dropout problems among Navajo girls and other American Indian students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this literature review was to describe the complex issue of Indigenous education in the United States, including the ongoing research that seeks to distinguish aspects that directly affect Native student retention and investment, whether in a positive or negative way. The chronicle of Indian education in the United States is not a simple story of historical mileposts, Supreme Court decisions, or federal policy shifts, but an account of cultural dichotomies, ideological and economic imperatives, and continuous policy realignments that have been only partially successful due to an apparent inability to concede Native rights to complete autonomy and self-direction. Indian education also includes the stories of individuals, families, and entire tribes who have endured the violence of rigidly conformist assimilative practices that endure into the twenty-first century, even though educators and public policy-makers seldom acknowledge the influence of post-colonial discourses on curriculum and pedagogy. In order to provide a clear, comprehensive explanation of the ways that United States education and Indian policies contribute directly to the continuing dropout situation among Native youth, the literature review covers several key domains and offers a thorough examination of the roles of cultural and ethnic identification on academic success and retention among Indigenous adolescents.

This chapter begins with in-depth explanation of the theoretical framework that guided the analysis and research, to establish an orientation for the review. Social construction theory offers many direct applications for the areas of policy determination,

educational goals and methodologies, cultural adaptation, and identity formation that are the focus of this review. The first section includes an analysis of ideology and its manifestation in political and educational paradigms, establishing it as a lens through which to scrutinize political and educational decisions at different levels. Subsequent sections include a historical review of the relationship between the United States and Native tribes, emphasizing the concepts of nationhood and self-rule, followed by an examination of the current literature on tribal autonomy in contemporary America. The review then turns to the shifting definition of the purpose of education in the United States, and the way this affects Native tribes seeking to align with the 2001 (NCLB) Act and the Race to the Top initiative included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (H.R. Res. 111-5, 2009). The following section examines research on the influence of culturally relevant curricula and school environments on academic achievement among Native students. The review then concludes with an in-depth investigation of the influence of a strong sense of ethnic identity on Indigenous adolescent identity development and mental health.

Literature Search Strategy

This literature search included a variety of resources, including books, scholarly articles, and dissertations. The databases accessed for this research included Google Scholar, PSYCHInfo, Academic Premier, Sage, SocIndex, and ERIC. Because of the broad field of investigation, Appendix D contains a complete listing of the databases and search terms.

Theoretical Foundations

Social construction of reality provides the theoretical foundation for this inquiry, inasmuch as it offers a singularly effective lens through which to examine not only the manner in which the environment and social constructs inform individual and group perspectives, but also a means of explaining the rationales for their choices. In his book explaining the profound perceptual dissimilarities between East and West, Nisbett (2003) noted that individuals view the world through lenses provided by society and culture, and these lenses shape the ways that they interpret time, communicate, even their fundamental thinking patterns—whether linear or cyclical. Culture and environment also influence the manner in which human beings create hierarchies of power and value, two central aspects of communal structure (Nisbett, 2003). A grasp of the epistemological and ontological foundations of meaning making, whether individual or group based, is useful for understanding the general assumptions and perceptions that guide both the purpose and extent of federal education policies, as well as the conceptions of those affected by these policies, including the Indigenous peoples of the United States.

One of the primary appeals of social constructionism as theory is the manner by which it reflects human variance and adaptability. In 2009, Gergen proposed that as theory, social construction combines the features of other frameworks and is flexible in its application and interpretation; it examines individual truth and the validity of objectivity as a concept. Physical reality does not impose a specific interpretation, but exists in of itself; culture and society influence each individual's unique discernment of this phenomenon. Gergen also suggested that interpretations of reality become infused

with hierarchies of value determined by the community, and that traditions stem from those that endure. Early twentieth century political and sociology texts examine the philosophical foundations of the social construction of knowledge and descriptions of its nuanced manifestation in human interactions.

Context is central to the way human beings perceive and construct interpretations of reality. Karl Mannheim (1936) proposed that physical environment and the constraints of time influence the way groups interpret events and that they will attempt to impose these explanations on others. Individual thought becomes only one strand in a complex web of group thought, manifesting the patterns developed over time by that group, and generally aligning with its precepts; those at the apex of the authority hierarchy will supply the group narrative, and enforce such through either coercion or persuasion (Mannheim, 1936). Mannheim also questioned whether dissimilar conclusions reached by different groups situated in comparable circumstances indicate an inherent variance in thought processes, and posited that understanding the knower becomes the focus, as this might grant insight into the manner in which social constructions function, and are expressed in cultural and interpersonal behaviors. Mannheim was particularly interested in the way motives and experiences influence internal narratives; social class can determine meaning, creating distance between the worldview of those in the upper and lower strata of society (p. 31). Caruso, Vohs, Baxter, and Waytz (2012) found that social Darwinist perspectives that seek to impose hierarchies of personal worth based on levels of acquired wealth, still function to validate social stratification and encourage separation. The continuing underfunding of educational programs designed to enhance

opportunities for Native American children (H.R. 4908, 2014) reflects an enduring reluctance to elevate their position socially and financially, contributing to the narrative of social and racial discrimination that has marred relations between Native tribes and American policy-makers.

The question of whether socially erected boundaries between groups can serve to perpetuate misunderstandings and inequity is also relevant to this study. Mannheim (1936) suggested that membership in a specific collective shapes perspective, and could create a barrier to objectivity in understanding personal assumptions and motivations. The sense of inclusion is especially important in the area of political thought; Mannheim defined ideology as a conviction of personal and group correctness, combined with a concerted effort to discredit those who hold differing views (p. 61). This certitude goes beyond an attempt to force conformity, becoming a resolution to nullify the other's social constructs, including the traditions and cultural mores that have sustained it (Mannheim, 1936). Mannheim's flexible definition of ideology removes common limitations utilized in discourse, which tend to reduce the concept to a particular point of view, such as conservative or liberal frameworks in the American political system, or the importance of a sense of place (Feld & Basso, 1996) among many people. Instead, Mannheim suggested that the term represents a fixed and immutable perspective of rightness of thought, and the accompanying need to discredit threats to its validity. The attitudes of colonializing nations toward those subjected to occupation reflected this perspective; in the case of American Indians, documentary evidence is replete with pejorative references to Native cultures, and oppressive attempts to extinguish these by forcibly removing Indian

children to distant boarding schools, and subjecting them to activities designed to instill Western concepts of civilization (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). The words of one superintendent of the Haskell Institute (now Haskell Indian Nations University) clearly reflect perceptions of the superiority of European-American values, and the need to inculcate these in Indian children; in his August 30, 1888 letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, Robinson exhorted the government to expand its forced schooling program:

> Let the Government recognize its duty to these Indian children, take every one of them as soon as it becomes 5 or 7 years of age, send it to school and keep it there till 18 or 20 years of age, or until it shall have learned sufficient to be self-supporting, and then there will be a speedy end to complaints of returning to blankets and barbarism. If never sent into barbarism or where it is popular they will have no inducement to become barbarous. Thorough work or nothing should be the motto. 'Drink deep or taste not the Pierian spring' applies with emphasis in this case. The responsibility in this matter attaches to the people through the legislative department of the Government as the Executive has gone to the full extent of its authority and evidently would gladly go further is permitted. (Department of the Interior, 1888, p. 262)

The sincerity of Robinson's intent is evident, as is the ideological conviction of correctness. Mannheim (1936) recognized the historicity of norms and that contemporary perceptions are important influences in ideology (p. 80). While one might argue that educators considered these views to be normal in the 19th century, present-day

policymakers and educational administrators should not minimize their pernicious and persistent effects. Modern policies toward Native populations no longer include active attempts at extermination, but the indifference and resistance now manifested at the federal level might represent as destructive an ideological bent as that demonstrated by Robinson's letter.

Cultures evolve over time within the context of their environments; assumptions developed within unique circumstances can become the basis for future stances in relation to other cultures or changing conditions. Scheler (1992) used the term "relatively natural worldviews," modifying the prevalent contemporary description of how individuals and groups create meaning from their experiences (p. 208). To Scheler, a natural worldview does not need validation to be accepted unequivocally. Acknowledging that groups worldwide have developed separate explanations for their experiences and their relationships to the environment, Scheler emphasized that societies evolve over time and thus their knowledge systems and definitions reflect their cumulative interpretations, unique to each culture. Discriminating between seven different levels of artificiality, Scheler sought to conjoin developmental stages of comprehension and explanations of reality with societal evolution (p. 209), and distinguished between different ways of knowing and understanding environmental influences. In this context, ideology becomes an expression of commonality between individual perceptions within a specific group; what Scheler termed *pseudo-knowledge* is generally unexamined and unquestioned, often prejudicial, and promoted as public opinion (p. 180).

Scheler (1992) appeared to have a somewhat more liberal interpretation of ideological positioning than did Mannheim (1936), inasmuch as he did not seem to infer the same implacable interpretive solipsism. Placing this within a modern multicultural context, Scheler's idea suggests that individuals are capable of bridging cultural divides, and of discourse focused on recognizing the inherent validity of differing perceptual positions, while developing connections that make the most of the advantages offered by each. In a school setting, these connections might be created when Native educators train other teachers in the ways of their culture, and become engaged in curriculum and program development, ensuring that these cultural features become an integral part of any school Native students attend.

Other attempts to explain the way individuals position themselves within their physical and social environments, and develop their belief systems from this placement, include consideration of the negotiation between individual and group perceptions of reality. Simmel (1971 version) sought to define society as structure, stating that sociation is the result of individual recognition and acceptance of the presence of others, as well as a level of integration of their perspectives (p. 8). Simmel also suggested that complete understanding of the other's perception is impossible; instead, the lens through which the other is observed must be distorted by personal interpretations of reality, leading to the conclusion that the more similar another is to self, the less objective the evaluation and comprehension of their point of view (p. 9). Typification, defined as "perceiving the world and structuring it by means of categorical types" (McKinney, 1969, p. 1) is an aspect of this incomplete discernment, and serves to categorize the other in such a way as

to complete unknown areas. The other's viewpoint adds dimension to this fragmented perception, providing some level of structure for interactive processes that allow relationships between members of a given social group (p. 10). Hence, we see each other incompletely (p. 11), and tend to use categorizations to provide substance to this somewhat ephemeral knowing of the other. Simmel's analysis indicates that individual positioning within a social group might effectively limit the ability to comprehend nonconforming frames of reference, inevitably influencing perceptions of nonmembers. In the context of the profound cultural divide between Euro-American and Native American groups, one might infer that Simmel's conclusions indicate inevitable misconceptions and conflict, absent deliberate efforts to overcome perceptual barriers. This endeavor should include all stakeholders if a truly effectual collaboration is to result; in education, a first step would be to explore the possibility that social constructions contribute to the academic crisis confronted by Indigenous children, and develop strategic responses to bridge the cultural chasm that exists (Bryson, 2011, p. 219).

Encapsulating differing perspectives into a holistic, functional, and fully integrated worldview incorporates both social and individual contributions to a gradual process of inclusion. Berger and Luckmann (1966) built a conceptual framework for the way individuals comprehend their universe and how separate sets of perceptions become socially accepted norms that transfer to others within the group. That which Scheler (1992) described as a *natural worldview* (p. 208), Berger and Luckmann (1966) termed *paramount reality*, the environment within which all exist but each individual understands differently (p. 21). Language provides commonly shared labels and

definitions; these references also offer the possibility of symbolic attributions to events, people, places, living creatures, or objects, and expand the number of ways to interpret experience (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Both Mannheim's (1936) and Scheler's (1992) descriptions of ideological thinking find a corollary in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) explanation of *typefication*, or the tendency to categorize others (p. 31). The authors suggested that this typecasting could influence inter- and intra-group interactions; the greater the physical distance, the higher the level of anonymity and the more typefication becomes assumption-based and disconnected from reality. Institutions provide a level of permanency and legitimacy to these conceptualizations, offering predictability to its members (pp.54-55). The inherent immutability of this arrangement, though, can become problematic when ideas become enshrined as facts, and self-justifying in part due to their continued existence within an institution (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Ideas such as racial discrimination can thus become what are called *sophisticated legitimations* of concepts embedded in a social construct that provide rationales for behaviors based on these ideas (p. 65). Ideology again becomes the perception that the accepted version of reality holds the ultimate claim to validity, falsifying any deviance from the stated norm (p. 66).

When societies with differing systems of symbolic attribution meet, each senses the need to validate its own constructs in order to maintain cohesiveness. The most frequent approaches to this eventuality are attempts at assimilation, nullification of concepts that conflict with the predominant narratives, conversion of these into conceptions more closely aligned with the accepted versions, or annihilation by force

(Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Historical accounts of early interactions between Euro-American settlers and Native populations support this interpretation of the social construction of reality; Linday's (2014) description of the brutal genocidal behaviors of California gold miner communities when intersecting with Native peoples, whose land and resources they coveted, offers one small glimpse into the extreme behaviors that ideological constructs can generate. Theodore Roosevelt's (1894) expansive statement justifying the invasion and occupation of territories west of the Mississippi clearly reflects racist assumptions of superiority prevalent in early American thought, and its use to justify the extermination of aboriginal populations:

> Whether the whites won the lands by treaty, by armed conquest, or, as was actually the case, by a mixture of both, mattered comparatively little, so long as the land was won. It was all-important that it should be won, for the benefit of civilization, and in the interests of mankind. It is indeed a warped, perverse, and silly morality that would forbid a course of conquest that has turned whole continents into the seats of mighty and flourishing civilized nations. All men of sane and wholesome thought must dismiss with impatient contempt the plea that these continents should be reserved for the use of scattered savage tribes, whose life was but a few degrees less meaningless, squalid, and ferocious than that of wild beasts with whom they held joint ownership. (p. 54)

In his 1892 report to the United States Civil Service Commission, Roosevelt's appraisal of Native American adaptation to Euro-American agricultural methods, education, and cultural mores suggested his conviction that not only were White

structures superior, but that the level to which these were integrated by Native groups was a reflection of their intelligence and capabilities (Jensen, 1981). These documents reveal that Roosevelt justified behaviors that had benefited White settlers at the expense of Indigenous populations, and validated the assumptions that underlay these acts. Europeans devised the term *White man's burden* to rationalize imperialist and assimilative practices; the ideology that European cultural and government structures were superior to those of less industrialized groups presumed a duty to impose European values on Indigenous peoples globally, including in the United States (Jordan, 1974). While the expression and concepts seem archaic, their premises are still apparent in American educational practices, especially those emphasizing the need to instruct children in a uniform, standardized, English-based curriculum.

Focusing primarily on scientific discoveries, Kuhn (2012) wrote about individual interpretations of phenomena, and the way researchers confronting the same observable fact will view it differently given their understanding and background (p. 17). Theories are based on the most likely explanation of these observations, but do not generally explain them fully, hence are guiding frameworks for research designed to expand their usefulness (Kuhn, 2012). Discussing paradigmatic inflexibility and the way it can direct research, Kuhn noted that rigidity sometimes reinforces incorrect assumptions rooted in an incomplete understanding of phenomena. Intellectual intransigence stems from a human tendency to accept established interpretations of phenomena and the theoretical constructs that appear to explain these, while resisting challenges to these ideas (Kuhn, 2012). Emphasizing the cognitive dissonance that brings about the perceptual shifts

called discoveries, Kuhn argued that these consist of (sometimes reluctantly) recognizing the importance of anomalies previously dismissed as insignificant or ignored because they did not fit preset expectations. It would seem then, that when enough anomalies or inconsistencies become apparent, the paradigm itself must either shift, or become irrelevant and useless (Kuhn, 2012).

While limiting his discussion to the scientific community, Kuhn's argument aligns with those of social construction theorists seeking to explain how perceptions of legitimacy can become inflexible barriers thwarting productive discourse that might result in new approaches and interactions between dissimilar groups. This interpretation is especially relevant when investigating the apparent separation between mainstream ideas of education's purpose and academic success, and those based on intrinsically different values and norms. In the United States, the emphasis on test scores, technological proficiency, and goal-oriented academic pursuits frames education as a tool with which to achieve individual material success. This definition of learning, however, might not coincide with those cultures such as the Native American and other Indigenous people, nor does it include other aspects of the value of learning, including integration with the universe, creating connection with nature, developing community, interdependence, and spiritual well-being. Finding a way to accommodate these and other definitions of value means accepting different perspectives, broadening education's purview, and developing inclusive approaches when creating curricula and programs.

Kuhn's (2012) statement that a "proliferation of versions of a theory is a very usual symptom of crisis" (p. 71) is useful when examining the area of Indian education,

as researchers and policymakers seek to understand the forces precipitating the high number of Native students withdrawing early from secondary school, and develop constructs to explain these. The story of federal Indian education policy reflects differing attempts to impose structure on a disconcerting situation by using disparate and ineffective approaches, seeking yet unrealized outcomes (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006). Social construction theory can provide a useful lens through which to examine these developments, focusing especially on definitions of sovereignty between the federal government and Native tribes, the way in which education's meaning and purpose varies, and how these variations influence policy and application, as well as the relevance of schooling to individuals with differing worldviews. This theory's inclusivity thus also permits its use when exploring the perceptions of American Indian students as they interact with an educational system created for and by Euro- American citizens, and the consequences thereof.

Social Construction in Policy Development

In 1999, Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon delineated a theoretical framework with which to examine the influence of social constructions on actuated public policy in the United States, focusing especially on the way specified populations experience either favoritism or discrimination (p. 95). The process is synergistic in many ways, as the consequences of policy decisions on these populations affect their perceptions of those empowered to design and create the rules, as well as their own ability to influence outcomes or future decisions (p. 96). In addition, these policies initiate a cycle of legitimatization, reinforcing negative or stereotypical societal perceptions of targeted

groups and embedding these in policy, thus perpetuating their existence and creating obstacles to change (Ingram, Schneider, & DeLeon, 1999). Schneider and Sidney (2009) argued that since humans create constructions, there is an inevitable implication of mutability and inherent bias, both of which can redirect any distribution of power and benefits. A focus on the manner in which policymakers initiate and develop laws becomes especially relevant when studying the unfolding relationship between the federal government and Native tribes. Schneider and Sidney (2009) suggested that the degree to which particular groups are granted access to the political process and their voice heard is in large part determined by perceptions of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, as well as the way in which their problems are represented (p. 108).

Groups whom society has categorized as less entitled to recognition or respect confront the dilemma of being unheard and often dismissed; the ensuing imposed silence then serves to perpetuate society's perception of their irrelevance (Schneider & Sidney, 2009, p.111). These obstacles to full participation in the democratic process appear evident in the area of education, traditionally considered a primary instrument for socialization and perpetuating cultural values. Lee (2009) noted that racial sub-contexts have often directed educational policy; if education is a means for equalizing opportunity and attaining social parity, the extent to which it becomes available to minorities will determine their ability to attain this idealized outcome. The history of education in the United States is replete with conceptualizations of minority groups predicated on assumptions of their inherent insufficiency and incompetence, whether physiological or cultural, and programmatic developments seeking to either compensate for, or perpetuate

these perceived deficits by using assimilative approaches or channeling students into vocational programs (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) proposed a different path of using strengths-based interventions to empower minority students, and help them realize the validity and worth of their traditions and culture. The Navajo tribe's holistic cultural content standards adopted in 2000 offers an example of such, as it focuses on Navajo cultural values and strengths, proving a path for enhancing cultural identity while integrating the "learning and knowledge of other societies" (*T'áá Shá Bik'ehgo Diné Bí Ná nitin dóó Ihoo'aah,* 2000, p. iii).

Although particularly applicable to the study of the way federal Indian policy has been designed and written, and the social constructions of those who have over time devised its multiple and often contradictory aspects (Cohen, 1953), the social construction theoretical framework has rarely been used for this purpose. Pierce, Siddiki, Jones, Schumacher, Pattison, and Peterson (2014) conducted a 15-year meta-analysis of scholarly literature on social construction in policy design; of 123 sources located, only two addressed the manner in which Native Americans were constructed as target groups, and neither focused on educational policy or tribal interactions with the BIE). The complex and unique position that American Indian students occupy as American citizens, tribal members, and participants in multiple cultural environments are strong incentives for reevaluating the constructs underlying federal responsibilities, and the limits currently imposed on tribal authority in determining appropriate educational strategies for their children.

Utilizing the concept of social construction as a lens can also offer insights into paradigms underlying theoretical frameworks in educational research. Huffman (2010) argued that research in education has been multifaceted, driven by differing political and social priorities; foci have shifted as popular themes have emerged and received consideration, only to fade with time (p. 6). Huffman's (2010) suggestion that theories serve as "temporary frameworks enabling us to intellectually account for phenomena" (p. 9) reminds us that as such their explicative potential might be limited and situational. Competing theories are evidence that all phenomena entail infinite variables, hence results should be generalized with caution; this especially applies to Native research, inasmuch as unique cultures and circumstances limit generalizable conclusions (Huffman, 2010). Four primary theoretical perspectives dominate Native educational research at this time, each seeking to understand the way cultural differences separating mainstream Euro-American and Indigenous cultures affect adjustment levels and academic success among Indian youth (Huffman, 2010). Cultural discontinuity constructs examine the divide between educational environments and those of home and community, while structural inequality frameworks focus on the way dominant social discourses and economic constructions affect minority populations, including the manner in which educational settings reflect these disparities. In addition, interactionalist theory seeks to understand the influence of transitions between cultural settings, while transculturation theory explores the connection between cultural identity achievement and academic success for Indigenous students at the college level (p. 12).

Even as each of these theoretical frameworks approaches the fundamental issue from a different perspective, and thus can shed some light the problem, they do not appear to result in any real consensus as to cause and effect. This inability to determine causality might suggest an incipient theoretical crisis as defined by Kuhn (2012), perhaps requiring a reframing of the problem. Tyler et al. (2008) noted that empirical data supporting the fundamental claims of cultural discontinuity theory are rare, and sought to supply a methodology based in quantitative collection methodologies that would in fact support these in the area of academic achievement. One early challenge was the difficulty of determining common cultural traits among minority groups, in order to measure their influence on their interactions in mainstream American schools (Tyler et al., 2008). This difficulty increases when studying American Indian cultural values, inasmuch as each of the more than 500 tribes are unique; the refining process thus implies attempting to distil the numerous culturally based behaviors in order to glean a few that can be assumed to be universal (p .288). While Tyler et al. (2008) narrowed the plurality into a few categories that appeared inter-mutual; their study highlights the dangers of assuming such commonalities, and applying them as operationalized values when studying a group's ability or willingness to function within an alien cultural environment.

The construction of a single meta-theory accounting for the wide variances in cultural constructs and geographically unique perspectives may prove to be an impossible task, suggesting the need for different approaches. Huffman (2010) offered the alternative of following the lead of Native researchers whose lenses might be more appropriate for studying values with which they are familiar and mainstream researchers might not be.

Decolonization as construct offers not only a means of examining the multiple ways in which assimilation and subjugation operate within the congruency of mainstream American and Native cultures, but also supplies researchers with an international data base of shared inquiry (Huffman, 2010, p. 210). Critical race theory examines the manner in which discourses of race, social norms, and ideology underlie interactions between cultures with divergent worldviews, while Brayboy's (2005) tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) focuses specifically on the interactions between American Indian and mainstream Euro-American societies, using nine tenets as guideposts for researchers to examine this relationship (as cited in Huffman, 2010, p. 216). These theories share a number of fundamental premises with social construction theory, and support its use for understanding how political imperatives and ideologies have framed the discourse on tribal sovereignty. The use of social construction seems especially pertinent for studies of American Indian education, and the way Native adolescents view their educational experiences, as well as the factors that might compel some to abandon their studies before completion.

The Historical Question of Tribal Sovereignty

Each of the theoretical explorations of the sociology of knowledge recognizes the potential violence--whether overt or implicit--inherent in ideological thinking, and the difficulties that arise when individuals confront narratives at variance with accepted conceptual frameworks. In the United States, this type of encounter is intrinsic, due to a citizenry consisting of disparate immigrant cultures living in close proximity. The history of the interactions between Native peoples and government is complex, as the

epistemologies of Indigenous cultures differ considerably from those of a primarily Euro-American population. Bang and Medina's (2010) comparison of Western and native ways of understanding science explained how the Native community engaged their children in experiencing not only Western positivist approaches, but also in framing the questions in such a way as to make the answers meaningful to their environment and to the community within which they lived. Tippeconnic III and Tippeconnic Fox (2012) provided a listing of traditional Indian values that contrast sharply with those of mainstream America, including an emphasis on group cohesiveness, absence of materialism, working to meet one's needs as opposed to accumulating wealth, living in the moment, and infusing one's life with mysticism and spirituality. These differences increase in complexity when considering the uniqueness of the numerous Native tribes and the shifting priorities and ideological stances of policy makers and agency officials (Fixico, 2004). Federal policy has tried to incorporate these concepts in its reforms, while insisting upon framing changes within contemporary American ideas on education (Fixico, 2004).

Historians have written extensively about the cultural clashes that occurred between European settlers and the aboriginal peoples of North America; characterized by violence and profound misunderstandings, as well as occasional instances of cooperation and mutuality (Edmunds, 2004); these differences set the stage for the imbroglio that characterizes the ongoing discourse between tribal and federal governing bodies. Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution of the United States grants Congress the power to "regulate Commerce with foreign Nations, and among the several States, and with the

Indian Tribes," and codifies Native tribes as separate sovereign entities. The Trade and Intercourse act of 1790 provides the first language that distinguishes Indian tribes as entities, and solely authorizes the President to engage in developing treaties with such, or other agreements backed by the government (An Act to Regulate Trade and Intercourse with the Indian Tribes, 1790). From these seemingly straightforward beginnings, however, has emerged a complicated and ever evolving definitional process wherein succeeding administrations and Supreme Court decisions granted, abrogated, and altered tribal authority, legitimacy, or even right of existence.

The problematic relationship between the federal government and Native tribes include semantics aspects, as hierarchical terminology often defines how groups position themselves in relation to others. Official wording to describe tribes include *foreign nations*, *domestic dependent nations*, *distinct, independent political communities*, and, more recently, as *third sovereigns* (Fletcher, 2012, pp. 56-59). Wilkins (2001) wrote that the imprecise relationship between the United States and tribal nations "deprives aboriginal peoples, collectively and singly, of a clear and consistent understanding of the powers and rights they may be capable of exercising" (p. 223). The federal-tribal relationship is an imposed arrangement construed as a voluntary surrender of authority via treaty, leading to the eventual assignation of plenary power to Congress, which can extend even to tribal internal affairs (Fletcher, 2012). This act of ceding to the federal government by treaty created a trust obligation to protect Native interests "with the faithfulness of a fiduciary"; the exercise of assumed plenary power by Congress, however, has resulted in severely restricted tribal sovereignty and legal authority (Davis,

2014, p 525). Limited sovereignty is manifest in the area of Indian education, where the government has only gradually ceded self-determination to Native tribes.

American conceptualizations of granting sovereignty to indigenous groups are rooted in Western European history. Records predating United States legislative interpretations of Native rights or obligations include those of European nations whose occupation of North American lands entailed negotiated or conflictual relationships with the aboriginal peoples (Alfred, 2004). Alfred outlined numerous references to the autonomous, sovereign position of Indigenous nations found in most primary documents relating to treaties and agreements between European nations and Native populations (p. 461). Alfred also described the degree to which acceptance of this status has shifted according to the perceived needs of the dominant societies, most of which are to this day still using a frame of reference that grants undue power and authority to a political framework based on colonial concepts of domination and control. Felix Cohen (1942), attorney for the Department of the Interior under President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the central proponent of the Indian New Deal, proposed that the best way to protect Indian rights and sovereignty was through federal oversight. Drawing from the various Supreme Court rulings that intervened in State and local attempts to exploit Native tribes, Cohen wrote that "the imposition of rigid control over all intercourse" between citizens and Native tribes was the purview of the federal government, and only through the exercise of such would Native rights of self-government and property be protected (pp.6-8). Cohen also noted that American Indian law finds its basis in international law as originally formulated by seventeenth century Spanish jurists, and as such recognizes tribal

sovereignty; historically, this recognition has also entailed classifying Indian nations as dependent entities to whom the United States owes special protection (p .17).

The intrastate nature of federal-tribe relations and the absence of distinct, internationally recognized borders to act as cultural buffers, complicate the relationship between the tribal and federal governments. Boyer (2012), reviewing Cohen's positions, argued for a reexamination of federal policy toward Indian tribes and for the government to redefine the differences between Euro-American and Native cultures, reducing their supposed problematic aspects. This move could lead to multicultural governance, which, while not clearly delineating the boundaries between federal and tribal sovereignty, could eliminate the post-colonial remnants that pervade the interactions between the two groups (Boyer, 2012). This suggests a postmodernist reconstruction of power configurations toward horizontality, a reframing of discourses to eliminate otherness, and the purging of the manifest destiny meta- narrative that has pervaded political and social discourse since the inception of the United States (Saito, 2009).

Numerous changes have gradually shifted the relationships between federal, state, and tribal governments into *multilevel governance regimes* (MLG) (Papillon, 2011, p. 291), arrangements that now include negotiations between tribes and states, as well as local governments and individual corporations. Papillon (2011) proposed that relational shifts between tribes and governing entities become a layering process, where new practices superimpose upon the rigid constructs of established procedures, gradually replacing these in practice without altering the fundamental premises (p. 293). Jurisdictions are negotiated, as MLGs offer opportunities to redefine such established

parameters as those describing Native nations as domestic dependent nations (*Cherokee Nation v.* Georgia, 1831; Papillon, 2011). These developments might engender new definitions of sovereignty as tribes create their own within situational contexts, as opposed to inter-governmental confrontation, which has proven to be time consuming and unsatisfactory.

The discretionary authority retained by the United States government creates a continuous tension that has yet to be resolved; as Papillon (2011) noted, Congress' plenary power continues to supersede tribal self-determination. Ford (2010) listed numerous cases where absolute autonomy has been challenged whenever sought, concluding that tribal attempts to claim independent authority has not brought about enhanced sovereignty, but has instead shifted their situation to resemble that of quasi-states (p .409). The federal government can preempt the autonomy of these allegedly self-governing entities when deemed appropriate, whether or not they agree with the arrogation (p. 410). Ford described a specific decision that confiscated tribal lands based on a legal interpretation of tribal sovereignty; areas inhabited predominantly by Whites had "lost their Indian character," hence were no longer to be part of the reservation (Brendale v. Confederated tribes 7 Bands of the Yakima Indian Nations, 492 U.S. 409 (1989), as cited in Ford, 2010, p.410).

Consent and participation within social contracts, whether imposed or agreed upon, provide a framework within which to understand the difficult relationship between tribal and federal entities. Maloberti (2010) proposed that the ideal relationship between individual and state is one wherein state institutions enforce--but do not infringe upon--

inherent human rights to self-determination and choice. Without the concepts of implicit and explicit consent, this relationship would preclude the existence of an entity entitled to dictate compliance with established societal norms (p. 469). Explicit consent, according to Maloberti, grants permission based on implied acceptance of the consequences of said choice, thus permitting acts not otherwise authorized. Adjuration of explicit consent, however, does not necessarily grant legal immunity, inasmuch as the right of dissent might be denied if opposition to implied conditions and consequences is not considered adequate, and the decision to participate within the existing parameters is construed as implicitly consenting to these (p. 470). Maloberti provided the simple example of refusing to pay for a meal in a restaurant after eating it; the very acts of entering the establishment with intent to eat and ordering from a menu imply consent to the condition of paying for the meal (p. 470).

Implicit consent has serious implications for Indigenous sovereignty, inasmuch as legal arguments could affirm that Native tribes not explicitly consenting to federal acts infringing on their sovereignty have done so implicitly, even though this would indicate that Tribal authorities had a thorough grasp of the implications of this absence of dissent. A primary example of this premise would include the broad powers assumed by the federal government to dictate the manner in which Indian education was to occur. Implicit consent can be assumed under certain conditions (p. 470); as Maloberti (2010) noted, the very act of continuing to reside in a state, even though objecting to its rules and infringements, is considered inherent assent to these (p. 471). This argument suggests that the only legitimate expression of dissent for Indigenous people would have been the act

of abandoning their heritage lands and seeking residence outside the territories annexed by the American government. Maloberti, however, highlighted the difficulty of assuming consent in these circumstances, since " a state would seem to be normatively able to take residence as a sign of implicit consent, only if the individuals would have no prior claim-right to live in the territory free of coercive interference" (p. 475). Native tribes, arguably, are the only group with this explicit claim, hence their right to deny implicit consent by the state of any act infringing upon their absolute self-determination would appear legitimate. I expand on this subject in the section on tribal authority in education.

Explicit concurrence with federal dictates has implications in a number of areas for Native nations. Fletcher (2012) argued that the construct of consent is central to the conceptualization of tribal sovereignty in the United States, and queried whether any Native group truly consented to the status imposed by the federal government, listing the sequence of Supreme Court cases that incrementally eliminated tribal self-determination and granted plenary power to Congress. Although focusing specifically on tribal jurisdiction over nonmembers residing on tribal lands, Fletcher (2012) proposed a tribal consent theory that would automatically assume tribal authority over all aspects of governance on tribal lands, unless consenting to abrogation within specific contexts. The extent of this authority currently constitutes the primary tension between the federal government and Indian tribes. This unease has surfaced recently in the debates on whether to grant tribes permission to operate gambling enterprises on tribal lands, and how to regulate these, as well as how much leeway tribes should have in exercising their authority in cases involving non-member individuals and corporations (Conners, 2012;

Davis, 2014). Conners (2012) proposed that federal courts have viewed tribal legal structures and interpretations with suspicion in view of their different perspectives, consequently seeking to restrict their jurisdiction and, by such, depriving them of their right to regulate activities occurring on tribal lands. This incremental constriction will be difficult to reverse; a solution might be for the tribes and federal government to establish clear parameters for those actions that they agree to review, and which tribal authorities should resolve (Conners, 2012).

The question of sovereign rights and the numerous venues within Native tribes can exercise this privilege has also been scrutinized. Davis (2012) addressed the degree to which successive court decisions have curtailed tribal rights, thus denying them rights of action, including the right to seek redress for injustice and immunity from federal regulatory agencies when conducting business on tribal lands, even though these are implicit in their rights as sovereigns. Davis argued that as pre-Constitutional sovereign states, tribes had sovereign rights later guaranteed by treaty (p. 524) and protected by the trust doctrine (p. 525). Contrasted against this fundamental premise, Davis proposed that the "doctrine of discovery in Indian law" (p. 526) has provided the United States with an avenue through which it could gradually restrict tribal sovereign powers under the guise of trusteeship, and grant itself plenary powers over all Indian affairs (p. 527). While questioning whether it is possible to align mainstream and Native legal doctrines and interpretation of justice, Davis suggested that the piecemeal approach currently in evidence in legal disputes involving tribal rights finds its basis within the least favorable view of these rights. The government should instead expand its perspective to assume the

broadest interpretation possible, unless directly contravened by Congress. These arguments appear to indicate a growing movement toward reexamining Native sovereignty and developing a cohesive definition that would restore its original pre-constitutional status.

The ability to enforce laws within their own borders, now accepted by federal and state authorities, remains an important feature of sovereignty for tribes in the United States. Berger (2010) suggested that resistance to court decisions such as *Duro* v. *Reina* (1990), which essentially was an attempt to restrict tribal judiciary authority over non-member Indians, helped solidify the concept of tribal autonomy in law enforcement. The Supreme Court decision provided an opportunity for Native tribes to pressure Congress to reverse the outcome and grant them jurisdiction over nonmembers committing crimes on tribal lands (Berger, 2010; *Duro v. Reina*, 1990). Characterized as "legislation catalyzed by and drafted from within Indian country and supported unwaveringly by tribal leaders and Indian people themselves," *Duro Fix* represents one of the first examples of cohesive, united, effective action by multiple tribes to influence the manner in which United States law is interpreted and applied within their borders (Berger, 2010, p. 1192).

The 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has instituted a framework of norms for Indigenous self-determination, including education. Article 14 explicitly grants Indigenous peoples authority to establish and control educational programs taught in their native language and framed within their cultural values, adding that states must assist in ensuring that all Native children have equal access to education, including supporting their access to culturally relevant education

when possible (United Nations [U.N.], 2007). This broadly inclusive and idealistic proclamation has yet to be fulfilled, even in democratic states where constitutional language includes notions such as equal opportunity. Tribal nations exerting control over their own educational programs is a difficult concept for government agencies to accept in the United States.

In their review of milestones highlighting the relationship between the United States government and tribal groups, Fenelon and Trafzer (2014) noted the numerous ways in which the uses of mutable legal concepts, alterable by court decisions and influenced by contemporary economic aspirations, have historically functioned to deprive American Indigenous tribes of their inherent autonomy. Boronow (2012) theorized that these fluid definitional boundaries can generate conflict at all levels of governance, inasmuch as they establish parameters potentially interpreted as an intrusion on the legitimacy of state actions limiting Indigenous autonomy (including Congressional plenary power). Describing sovereignty as a spectrum, Boronow (2012) also suggested that in the United States, Indian tribes possess quasi-state status, wherein they meet international legal definitions of statehood, but their self-determination is generally restricted to internal affairs. As such, tribal self-governance will only include such acts as their ability to "enact and enforce laws…establish judicial systems…determine their own membership… [manage] their environment… determine who may vote...in tribal government" as well as "administer…governmental services" (Boronow, 2012, p. 1387-88). Notably absent in this list is the right of absolute educational self-determination,

which is conscribed by different rules and thus has yet to be granted by the federal government to Indigenous peoples of the United States.

Navajo Sovereignty

Tradition describes the original structure of Diné governance as centered within scattered small communities spread across the geography of the four corners region of the United States. Each community is said to have had a designated leader (*naataanii*) who headed a "deliberative body consisting of *hastoi,* or elders, and *hataali,* or medicine men," responsible for establishing social norms and economic principles for the community (Diné Policy Institute, n. d., p. 5). This model of government (*naachid*) also embraced a spiritual aspect which, as Begay and Maryboy (1996) explained, provided an equal representation between protective male characteristics (*haske nahat'a,)*, and nurturing female traits (*hozhooji nahat'a*) (p. 187). The *Naachid* was a periodically held ceremonial assembly of a wider group of tribal members, intended to arrive at solutions that could have widespread effects on the communities involved; the *Naachid* could be used to resolve conflicts," ensure an abundance of water and soil fertility," or develop political solutions that represented the group as a whole (Wilkins, 2002, p. 97).

Although the local governing body guided the community, it did not hold coercive powers, instead leading by example and inspiring the community's respect; each community was in essence a sovereign grouping holding no authority to dictate the actions of other groups (Diné Policy Institute, n. d., p. 5). This dispersed form of social contract allowed the Diné to maintain their cultural integrity throughout a prolonged period of colonialism by Mexico and early American settlers, inasmuch as agreements

made by any one community were not recognized by the others, thus maintaining the cohesiveness of the whole by localizing cultural or social infiltrations (p. 5). This would change, though, in the mid-19th century with the arrival of large numbers of European immigrants eager to settle the west and stake claims to land whether previously occupied or not.

The story of Diné governance shifted dramatically after the Long Walk, when the Diné people were forcibly removed from their homeland by the United States Army, and compelled to travel on foot 300 miles to Fort Sumner, New Mexico, where they remained imprisoned for four years ("The Long Walk," 2005). Curley (2014) suggested that this period marked the beginning of what could be described as a process of "classification and simplification" of the Diné people and their government, and of the creation of the Navajo *tribe,* an artificial construct with "legal and political weight" the federal government found useful for categorizing specific indigenous groups (p. 132). Now transformed into a unitary tribe, the Diné were coerced into signing a treaty that would allow them to return to their ancestral homelands. While the individuals selected by the federal government to act as *headmen* represented the Diné people, their leadership role was constricted by what has been described as a form of *indirect rule*, as practiced in Africa by British colonial authorities (Curley, 2014, p.135). This model of rule-by-proxy was designed to enforce colonial dictates through the voice of a selected chief or leader in order to make them more acceptable to the local population. Although the Diné people resisted these and later attempts to convert their social and cultural structure, the headman system endured until the 1930's (Curley, 2014). The Treaty of 1868 created the Navajo

reservation and the Diné were permitted to return to their homelands, although under continued circumscription by the United States government.

The story of opposition to federal mandates is intimately tied to the concept of sovereignty for the Diné. Curley (2014) listed early strategies of resistance after 1868, including ignoring imposed reservation boundary lines, raiding settlements that encroached on ancestral lands, defiance toward federal agency directives, and the use of *ceremonial knowledge* to harm those who collaborated with the federal government and its agents. When the BIA arbitrarily divided the Navajo Nation into six jurisdictions (1901-1934), each run by a government agent, the headman system dissolved, to be replaced by local councils called into play at the behest of the agency and expected to concede to BIA directives (Wilkins, 2002).

When oil was discovered on the reservation, oil companies, obligated to negotiate leases with different (and not necessarily cooperative) councils, pressed the Department of the Interior to create a unitary body with which they could collaborate (Wilkins, 2002, p.102). The DOI's decision to shift profits from oil and gas leases from local to tribal began the centralization process; in 1923 the department created the first Navajo Tribal Council, closely regulated and designed primarily to provide a unitary entity with which the government (and oil companies) could negotiate (p. 102). This first centralized entity granted power of attorney to the federal government to decide on oil and gas leases on behalf of the Dine' people, an authority it revoked in 1933 when the Council established its sovereign claim to regulate a wide spectrum of matters affecting the tribe, including its resources, health, education, and livestock management (p. 103).

The current form of government representing the Navajo tribe is largely the result of the federal government's decision to reduce livestock numbers on the reservation to enhance the longevity of the Hoover dam, and of the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 that would give Native tribes the opportunity to create for themselves a constitutional government (p. 105). The Council cooperated with the DOI's request to reduce livestock, in exchange for promises of additional land to be included within reservation boundaries; when these promises proved to be empty, Navajo voters held the Council responsible for their economic suffering and rejected the provisions of the Act (p. 105). Before dissolving, the existing Council created a committee to reorganize and write a Constitution; the new governing entity, still expected to defer to the DOI, emerged in 1938 (p.106). The now existing Navajo Council is a much-modified successor of these events; while it still must obtain DOI approval for major organizational changes, it has undergone a number of radical shifts as it reorganized into a governing entity more closely resembling the three-branch model employed by most states (Wilkins, 2002).

The Social Construction of Education

Education is, according to Article 26 of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, a benefit to which every individual is entitled. In the United States, the philosophical correlation between democracy and education has supported the gradual expansion and refinement of definitions that include purpose, scope, sequence, and access. Inasmuch as the 10th Amendment conveys to the states those powers not specifically delineated within the Constitution as the sole purview of the federal government, educational policy has generally been the responsibility of individual states

("Policy," 2014.) The U.S. Department of Education (DOE) is responsible for providing guidance on federal educational mandates and acts as intermediary between federal and state agencies for purposes of funding and monitoring compliance with equal access laws (U.S. Department of Education, 2010a). The Office of Indian Education (OIE) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) is responsible for implementing federal educational mandates such as the No Child Left Behind law (NCLB) and to coordinate with local educational agencies in applying for and implementing formula grants designed to improve academic achievement among Native children ("Indian Education," 2014). The BIE, a branch of the Bureau of Indian Affairs run by the U.S. Department of the Interior, develops policies, approves funding distribution, and monitors programs implemented by the federal government (Indian Education Policies, 2011). The agency is furthermore directed to "Encourage and defend the right of the Tribes and Alaska Native entities to *govern their own affairs in all matters relating to education*" and to advocate for these as they encounter state and local governments (Indian Education Policies, 2011b, p. 143, emphasis added).

These directives give the appearance of supporting the educational funding needs and right to self-determination of Indian tribes, and implicitly support Native efforts to request appropriate educational approaches at the state and local levels. The story of Native education in the United States, however, reflects an apparent indifference on the part of governing officials and school administrators toward implementing effective programmatic enhancements, inadequate investment in relevant teacher training, and listless support for developing coursework to revitalize heritage language and cultural

values (Beaulieu, 2008; McCoy, 2005). Understanding the reasons for these lackluster efforts requires an exploration of American definitions of the purpose of education, and the contemporary imperatives driving these. It is helpful to explore the correlation between American society's construction of value, and it influence in shaping educational policy and priorities.

Ideally, democratic educational environments embrace the diversity inherent in society, training students to negotiate these and emerge empowered, capable of critical assessment and possessing the tools necessary for negotiating their multiple environments. As Perry (2009) suggested, however, democratic societies can also provide situations where multiple stakeholders compete for resources and voice, often resulting in one group or concept dominating the discourse, and inequality of choice or opportunity. In the United States, the trend has shifted from enabling local entities to determine appropriate outcomes for their children, toward standardizing core curricula that require students to meet specific proficiency criteria, a trend that has also affected Native schools and deprived them of choice as to how their children are educated.

Education can serve as an instrument for socializing youth while perpetuating contemporary social norms and cultural heritage; theoretically, political ideology can be a potent underlying force shaping content, direction, and purpose (Almond, Powell, Dalton, & Strom, 2010). Apple (1995) suggested that power and hegemony, both cultural and economic, are important paradigmatic influences in American education, determining curriculum development and funding priorities, and proposed that constructions of social status, deservedness, and racial hierarchy pervade every aspect of institutional education,

and as such can be undetectable even to those seeking to counter their influences on an individual basis (p. 12). In effect, Apple argued, American schools find themselves caught in a dichotomous position of advocating for equality even as they enable stratification, and of funding interventional programs designed to alleviate individual deficiencies while promoting standardization. Deconstructing the ideologies that dictate priorities in education, Apple (1995) wrote that schools and curricula reflect the unexamined everyday "assemblage of commonsense meanings and actions that make up the social world" in a capitalist society designed to maintain hierarchies of wealth and power

(p. 37). Knowledge, in this framework, becomes a commodity designed to support an expanding economic system, with schools providing the medium to realize the process. Since only a percentage of the student population will successfully meet curriculum and grade requirements designed to fulfill this vision, schools function as filters to "sort out students according to their prospective places in the hierarchical market" (Apple, 1995, p. 47). If not understood, these hidden aspects can become a framework within which minority populations unknowingly perpetuate their own oppression as they struggle to fit in (Freire, trans.1970).

The role of education as pathway to economic success and increased political voice makes definitions important. Miller (1997) proposed that American education wavers between conservative and liberal definitions of its appropriate use (p. 1). Suggesting a method for understanding American educational priorities, Miller described five lenses though which to view these. The perspectives include the Calvinist or Puritan

theological ideas on human value and purpose, enthrallment with science and technology, a limited democratic creed upholding the ideal of individual choice but promoting social hierarchies, an emphasis on promoting the tenets of capitalism and personal enrichment, and promotion of the nation state as the ultimate repository of idealized cultural values (p. 3). In fact, Miller (1997) argued, Americans assume that the most important role of schooling is to prepare children to participate in the modern economy, and while approaches and outcome measures differ, the fundamental principle remains evident. Coolidge's (1925) declarations that "The chief business of the American people is business," and that wealth accumulation should be their primary occupation, expressed an ideology that exemplifies the way many Americans perceive education (Coolidge, *Address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors,* Washington, D.C., January 17, 1925).

Recent research examining education policy at both the federal and state levels supports these contentions. Mehta (2013) argued that the 1983 *A Nation at Risk* report commissioned by President Reagan initiated a paradigm shift as to the primary purpose of education among federal and state policymakers, toward one focused on developing marketable skills and raising potential productivity levels. Mehta's (2013) methodology included process tracing to create a twenty-year timeline of policy shifts correlated with documentary evidence reflecting central actors, including individuals and institutions. *A Nation at Risk* (1983), commissioned by the Department of Education, offered an unfavorable comparison between the American educational system and those of other prominent industrial nations, implying a potential decline of U.S. international economic

dominance (Gardner et al., 1983; United States National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Mehta (2013) explained that this focus prompted a wave of educational reforms directed at redefining the purpose of schooling and tying it explicitly to economic growth.

One of the most significant changes resulting from the new priority was the perceived need for federal intervention in educational objectives, and the establishment of standardized measures of outcomes for determining achievement in areas deemed critical to future economic growth (Mehta, 2013). Becker (2010), however, conjectured that economic factors have underlain the social construction of education for much longer. Using a linguistic analysis of federal policies and statements about education since 1946, Becker (2010) noted the devolution of the definition of education from the 19th century notion of being "equated with knowledge, wisdom, and traditional liberal notions of education as an activity meant to increase quality-of-life" (p. 419), to one of pragmatic utilitarianism, focused upon acquiring specific skill sets. The Vocational Education Act (1946) intended to create programs to assist young Americans obtain training for future employment; more recent legislation has specified a connection between science, mathematics and U.S. national economic interests, encoding this as an undisputed fact to guide the process of developing educational programs and curricula (Becker, 2010, p. 433). In addition, Becker noted, recent education legislation includes references to a supporting role for business interests, encouraging these to submit to schools lists of their prospective need for particular skills, while describing students in terms of their productivity potential.

The emphasis on citizens' contributions to national economic status has produced a shift in curricula and standards. Groen (2012) pointed toward the collective competence model of education, whose premises included differentiating children into tracks by perceived aptitude and channeling them toward either vocational or academic fields, as a primary conceptual driver of No Child Left Behind (p. 4). School accountability measures under NCLB have also changed curriculum development away from the arts and humanities, toward narrow programs that increase time spent studying the hard sciences and social studies, topics geared toward the new emphasis on international competiveness (Berliner, 2011; Groen, 2012). This gradual transformation of purpose produced an entrenched paradigm; what started as a positive idealization of education's role in generating individual and national prosperity has become institutionalized and undisputed.

The desire to redirect the social construction of education, and establish federal and state primacy over local school boards has become evident in legislative initiatives, and presented to the public through political speeches. Carpenter and Hughes (2011) analyzed rhetorical statements made by policymakers to determine the ideological basis of their views on education. Gubernatorial state of the state speeches given within the first eight years of the twenty first century provided content analysis data supporting the conclusion that governors across the United States emphasize the economic purposes of education far more than self-actualization, civic mindedness or community building (Carpenter & Hughes, 2011). This prioritizing transcends party lines and appears focused on embracing the vision of participating in the global knowledge-based economy, supporting the

growing emphasis on standardization and measures of efficiency (Carpenter & Hughes, 2011, p. 10). The Obama presidency's *Race to the Top* educational initiative, which affirms its ambition to help states graduate students described as "productive citizens who can out-compete any worker, anywhere in the world," reflects this contemporary construction of education's purpose and the federal role in achieving these goals (*Setting the Pace*, 2014, p. 2).

Higher education has also adopted this incremental redefinition of function. Cambridge (2012) noted that the stress on the marketability of higher education now transcends borders, effectively coloring international discourse as numerous international institutions prioritize graduating future global actors capable of working in various cultural environments. Cambridge described this contraction of purpose as an elevation of generic knowledge, or education whose sole purpose is to support the acquisition of marketable skill proficiencies (p. 236). Lair and Wieland (2012) argued that universities now frame their role within a discourse of developing student competitiveness as future employees, a shift students have integrated into the way they perceive their chosen fields of study. A survey of college students designed to measure the degree to which they connect education with future employment revealed that they often feel pressured to justify their majors in terms of vocational usefulness, and that fields of study emphasizing discrete skills were valued more than the humanities, as they were more likely to result in lucrative careers (Lair & Wieland, 2012, p. 445). Suspitsyna (2012) used critical analysis methodologies to review 164 Department of Education speeches posted online, seeking prevailing themes on higher education. The most commonly recurring thesis addressed

the correlation between economic drivers and higher education, emphasizing the need for Americans to acquire postsecondary education to ensure a continued competitive stance in the global economy; problems with graduation and skill levels were delineated in terms of lost tax revenues and productivity (Suspitsyna, 2012, p. 58). Re-signifying the primary role of higher education as economic rather than social, restricts its ability to contribute to the discourse on democratic principles and the evolution of society toward greater equity and pluralism (Suspitsyna, 2012).

Indian Education

The previous discussion examined the gradual repositioning of education's fundamental purpose in the United States to that of sustaining American economic competitiveness and hegemony, and the manner in which the federal government has intervened in what had previously been the purview of state and local entities, setting standards and establishing outcome measures. While these intrusions are relatively recent, interactions on education between Native tribes and the federal government have an extensive history of persistent interventionism. The progression of federal and state policies on Indian education reveal a set of deeply ingrained ideological perceptions of the relevance and value of Indigenous cultures and frameworks, which have often resulted in inept, destructive, and often inhumane attempts to correct or even eliminate their worldview (Lomawaima, 2004; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Meriam, 1928). These interactions appear to have stemmed from the ideologies of colonizing forces and a perceived imperative to civilize Indigenous populations according to European conceptions. Mannheim's (1936) description of the self-perceived prerogatives of the

absolute state includes the notion of being entitled to "set forth its own interpretation of the world," which it can later turn into a weapon and utilize to utterly transform its environment into a reflection of its own perspectives. Mannheim (1936) noted that this type of transformational zeal is sometimes justified with scientific discoveries that seem to imbue it with both philosophical and scientific legitimacy (p. 36); in the case of European and Native interactions, technological advances spurred by the Industrial Revolution might have offered a comparison perceived as favorable to European assumptions of cultural preeminence.

Education guidelines established by the BIA from its inception appear to have mirrored European colonist ideological imperatives, including views of which behaviors, apparel, belief systems, and interactions with the environment constituted civilization. Lomawaima and McCarty (2006) have detailed a historical sequence of policies implemented by the BIA which in turn attempted to annihilate Native cultures, permitted them within predetermined parameters deemed safe, channeled Native children into vocations deemed appropriate, and discouraged the use of heritage languages. Official directives exposed prevailing attitudes toward Indigenous peoples, while the methods used to force assimilation ranged from the blunt force of separating families and sending children to remote boarding schools, to the more subtle indoctrination techniques of distributing children's stories, such as Ann Nolan Clark's *Just for Fun* tales, that encouraged adherence to values promoted by the government. (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006, p. 100).

Assimilation and conformity, while now expressed more subtly, have not disappeared from American educational settings and pedagogies. Jackson (2010) examined the national discourse in the United States after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, noting a renewed emphasis on conformity to American norms ranging from appeals to patriotic sentiments and support for family values, to repeated calls for establishing English as the official language in the U.S, and standardizing curricula to ensure children's ability to function within the dominant culture. Beaulieu's (2008) analysis of the federal government's initiatives on Indian education found an intent to encourage the restoration and use of Native languages and culturally appropriate pedagogies , but only if they result in what Beaulieu described as a "quid pro quo relationship of Native languages and cultures to academic achievement" (p. 14). Under NCLB, this relationship would be measured by standardized testing of skills deemed most relevant for global economic competition, specifically math, reading, and science.

The Obama administration's *Race to the Top* initiative deepened federal intervention in education, by offering states competitive grants to implement reforms including standardizing curricula and performance measures (*Executive Summary*, 2009). Executive order 13592 (2011) supported collaboration between tribal authorities and the government in building the capacity and effectiveness of tribal educational agencies in providing services designed to assist American Indian students prepare for higher education, careers, and entering the workforce. These policy documents appear to panegyrize collaboration toward a common objective of academic achievement, based on assumed mutual values, namely participating in a system that promotes economic growth,

technological dominance, and neo-liberalist worldviews. The next section will examine Native responses to these assumptions, and analyze the dichotomy between culturally based pedagogies and outcomes framed by Euro-American priorities.

Interactions on education between tribal authorities and both state and federal governments reflect the same unease, indeterminacy, and definitional unpredictability that characterize these relationships in other domains. McCoy (2005) outlined policy shifts in Indian education since 1965, focusing on legal language that grants tribal sovereignty over educational programs and assessments for Native children, and noting statutory progress but lagging implementation. Some successful outcomes listed include the legitimate authority of Indian school boards, tribal guidance of BIE programs, Congressional support of Tribal Education departments, and the creation of tribally operated colleges and universities (TCU) (p. 5). In addition, the Native American Languages Act of 1990 acknowledged the critical role of Native languages in academic achievement, and tribal authority to "use Native languages as a medium of instruction" in BIA schools (p. 25), while Executive Order 10396 (1998) supported the development of (unfunded) programs designed to preserve Native languages and cultural heritage(Beaulieu, 2008;McCoy, 2005).

Among the most persistent problems confronted by tribes seeking educational autonomy are the discontinuity between policy intent and funding. These considerations have distinctly influenced interpretation of NCLB mandates. Under Title VII, NCLB grants must be used to develop and implement enrichment programs for Native students, including those which "incorporate American Indian and Alaska-Native specific

curriculum content" and 'bi-lingual and bi-cultural programs and projects" ("Title VII, 2007, para. 7). Beaulieu (2008), however, argued that under President Bush, the government "Implemented NCLB in a manner designed to diminish almost entirely the role of Native languages and cultures in schools with Native students," and that the OIE "was engaging in a deliberate policy of banning the use of Native languages and cultural instruction in Indian education programs" (Beaulieu, 2008, p. 32). McCoy (2005) asserted that the time has come for Title VII funds to be assigned directly to tribal agencies, whose cognizance of local needs are more developed than those of state or even local educational agencies (p. 36). BIA per-pupil funding should equal that of other federally funded schools, such as those operated by the Department of Defense, where support is between 30% and 50% higher than that granted BIA schools (McCoy, 2005, p. 37).

Other approaches designed to create parity between public schools and those operated by tribes include efforts to modify the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Recent bills have attempted to insert clauses allowing alternative assessments of Indian students in tribal schools to meet adequate yearly progress milestones, increase tribal involvement in programs and activities, and ensure that Title VII funding be directed solely toward the purposes described within (S 1262, 2011; H.R. 3568, 2011; H.R. 3569, 2011). These proposals also requested grant funding for tribal education agencies to design and implement programs that would turn around low performing schools. Included were efforts to require that the Department of the Interior allocate funds for programs targeting at-risk youth; the "Indian Children and Youth At-Risk Education

Program" would have granted tribes considerable authority in implementing "high-quality and culturally appropriate education programs to prepare Indian children and youth who are in correctional facilities" and assist them in their transition back into society (S 1262, sec. 1432). The defeat of these repeated efforts reinforces a perception of the federal government's intent to maintain plenary power while claiming to support increased self-determination—a dichotomy characterized as "say the right thing and do the opposite" (Beaulieu, 2008 p.31).

Tribal Sovereignty and Educational Choice

Academic success for minority students--as defined by grade point averages, continuance to higher education or even persistence until graduation from secondary school, might hinge on such seemingly straightforward concepts as school environment, instruction methodologies, and curriculum. The influence of culturally based curricula and use of heritage language in Native education have been investigated, to determine the level to which these influence response to academic material, integration of mainstream concepts such as the purposes of science and mathematics, and student perceptions of the relevance of academic achievement to their lives as members of distinct communities and cultures.

The Role of Language

Language occupies a unique and distinct position within the framework of a culture's sense of identity, and is the primary mechanism for transmitting information that supports the cultural group's conceptual constructs. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that language permits a group to share the "collective stock of knowledge" and

transmit this to future generations (p. 68). As such, language "becomes the depository of a large aggregate of collective sedimentations" which serve to ensure the continuance of traditional perspectives and worldviews (p. 69). Native language can serve to reinforce group cohesiveness among members of a distinct cultural heritage, supporting a sense of ethnic identity (McCarty, 2008; McCarty & Zepeda, 2010). Skutnabb-Kongas (2001), argued that heritage languages are more than a means of communication, as they contain vast stores of inherited cultural and environmental knowledge, becoming "…a necessary prerequisite for intergenerational transfer of that knowledge" (p. 203). This environmental knowledge can be critical for the preservation of biological diversity and conservation, inasmuch as those who have resided generationally within specific biomes have acquired experiential familiarity with its attributes, reflected in explicit terms developed to reference these features (p. 203). Skutnabb-Kongas also posited that inasmuch as language constitutes a significant aspect of a group's distinctiveness, its preservation and use in education become human rights, asserting that mental harm results when a dominant cultural group enforces the monopolistic use of its language in educational environments, a practice described as *linguistic genocide* (p. 206). Watson (2007) examined the manner in which colonial nations globally have instituted language instruction within their educational systems, noting that this one aspect can be a benign means of creating a sense of community within the nation state, but might also be a subtle means of establishing the dominance of one ethnic group (p. 256). The forces of globalization exacerbate these effects and accelerate heritage language loss as

commercialism pervades traditional cultures, and groups disperse to find employment (Watson, 2007).

In the United States, the Native American Languages Act of 1990/1992 acknowledges the central role of language in supporting not only the restoration and preservation of unique Native cultures, but also the connection between language and educational success (H.R. Res. PL 101-477, 1990; Warhol, 2011). Even though federal policy now reflects this awareness, language shift among Indigenous communities continues as English dominates academic, commercial, and other than tribal social settings; families seeking to help their children succeed can inadvertently participate in marginalizing their heritage language by encouraging the use of English rather than their mother tongue. Recent figures show that only a small percentage of Native children speak their heritage language fluently (DeVoe, Darling-Churchill, & Snyder, 2008; Gerena, 2011; Lee, 2009; McCarty, Romero-Little, Worhol, & Zepeda, 2009a).

The importance assigned to language in a curriculum can influence perceptions of its relevance. Hermes, Bang, and Marin (2012) argued for Native community participation in creating language recovery programs, recasting their heritage language as a vital component of curriculum, and moving away from traditional placements of Native language as a separate discipline (p. 396). Instead, recognizing the spoken word as the primary means for perpetuating traditional knowledge counters the perception of heritage language as an anthropologically interesting feature of disappearing groups and irrelevant to such activities as education (Hermes, Bang, & Marin, 2012). McCarty and Nicholas (2014) noted that “issues of educational equity, Indigenous self-determination, and the

(re) construction of community well-being via culturally distinctive world-views, identities, and life orientation" are centered on using Native languages as primary mediums in educational environments that serve Indigenous children (p. 107). These powerful attributes of the spoken word account for many of the assimilative practices in American educational history that were designed to eradicate Indigenous languages and force the use of English (Warhol, 2011). Linguistic assimilation might also be implicit within standardized testing in English required under the NCLB) (Balter & Grossman, 2009; Cohen & Allen, 2013)

To counter the effects of language and culture dilution created by such policies as NCLB, a number of tribes and Aboriginal groups have experimented with formal instruction given in the language specific to their people. McCarty (2009), addressing the effects of standardized testing in English required under NCLB protocols, and arguing for Native languages as primary mediums of instruction in Indian schools, noted the success of trial programs created by the Navajo and Native Hawaiian that were rooted in immersion methodologies. Students initially taught in their native language and then gradually introduced to English as they progress academically appear to remain invested in their education and score at higher levels than do their peers in conventional instruction environments (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; McCarty, 2009). Inasmuch as numerous unique American Indian languages exist, implementing heritage language revitalization and deployment in schools will be challenging, and require collaboration between government and local entities. McCarty and Nicholas (2014) suggested that realizing programs to serve unique populations will likely entail longitudinal planning

and considerable investment, specifying that " language revitalization efforts" must involve "language documentation, …development of… practical writing systems, the creation of teaching materials, technology development, and the preparation of language teachers."(p. 128). These goals will be difficult to achieve as long as contrasting definitions of the purpose and relevance of education persist in the United States, and ideological frameworks limit discourse and innovation to that which will advantage those in power.

Culturally Relevant Education

The concepts of multicultural and culturally relevant education are not new in the United States and have been explored on a number of levels, generally as a counter to homogenization trends that sought to ensure equity through uniformity, and encouraged individuals from various ethnicities to abandon their differences and become part of the American plurality (Banks, 2011). Minority groups have historically occupied a dichotomous position that has required them to accommodate dominant cultural constructs while encountering numerous exclusionary barriers to complete integration. Banks (2011) remarked that the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's introduced the concept of multicultural education as a means of achieving a level of equal educational opportunity, but early implementation included little more than recognizing special holidays and adding bilingual education programs (p. 13). Later, the ongoing failure of minority students to thrive in contemporary educational environments forced schools to engage in deeper structural changes, such as training teachers, examining school

environments, and pedagogical changes to accommodate different learning styles (Banks, 2011, p. 15).

The manner in which schools introduce cultural differences is an important area of inquiry. Lovern (2012) proposed that a profound difference exists between culturally relevant and multicultural education, noting that definitions of multiculturalism are difficult to operationalize to realize such goals as equity, mutual respect, and power sharing. Current educational practices instead encourage examination of differences in decontextualized settings, without promoting the necessary discourses to achieve real understanding of other cultures and value systems (870). In order to achieve this appreciation, Lovern recommended that cultures join "to create an equitable foundation for communication without establishing one mode of communication, knowledge, or justification as superior or preferable" (p. 881), and reposition cultural education to emphasize the complexity of traditional ways of knowing within disciplines, as well as their solutions to problems in different settings. These different frames of reference could be useful for promoting new definitions of educational equity.

A shift in perspective might result in new approaches to teacher training, especially for those working in areas with minority populations, along with curriculum and instruction that engage members of culturally distinct communities and ensure the authenticity of both material and methodology (Agbo, 2012; Bang & Medin, 2010; Deyhle & Comeau, 2011; Faircloth, 2009; Nam, Roehrig, Kern, & Reynolds, 2012). Sleeter (2012) commented on conventional approaches to multicultural education,

classifying them within four categories of "cultural celebration, trivialization, essentializing culture, and substituting cultural for political analysis of inequalities" (p. 568). Each of these shares the common feature of minimal examination of the implications of cultural differences in terms of inequality and oppression, and an apparent absence of realization of the profound differences in meaning making implicit in differing epistemologies (Sleeter, 2012). Teacher and staff training can become the purview of individual Native tribes, whose undisputed mastery of their own traditions gives them a unique role in creating culturally appropriate instructional material; the Navajo tribe has proposed this to the BIE along with other suggestions for creating environments that are more appropriate for their students (*Hearing on Education,* 2014).

Presenting a society as a conglomerate of different cultures can lead to unanticipated outcomes for students. May (2011) argued that in addition to a tendency toward homogenization and trivialization, multicultural essentialism can deprive the individual of agency and relegate cultural or ethnic identity to a fixed state of being with closed boundaries, forgetting the complexity of the process inherent in human development (p. 37). Redefining culture as a dynamic, fluid construct recognizes that individuals situated within a specific culture utilize its unique perspectives to adapt to the modern world (May, 2012). One example is the manner in which American Indian adolescents develop counter narratives to the subordination of their native language, wherein they assertively reposition it as a central aspect of their self-definition, even as they acknowledge the need for English and "draw upon multiple semiotic systems for different purposes in specific contexts" (Lee, 2009; McCarty et al., 2009, p. 299). These

manifestations of agency among Indigenous youth support some conclusions that fluency in their Native language and a strong sense of ethnic identity might correlate to personal perceptions of value and relevance (Kim & Chao, 2009; Lee, 2009).

Culturally based educational strategies that reflect the dynamics of relevance, individual adaptability, definitional differences, and group empowerment can become a potential resource for supporting academic investment among Native students and an avenue through which to implement programmatic reforms. Castagno and Brayboy (2008) proposed a distinct correlation between culturally responsive schooling (CRS) and Native American tribal sovereignty, inasmuch as the ability to choose methodologies and pedagogies not subjected to externally imposed standards, acknowledges rights implicitly granted by treaty. Writing that education in itself is a means for facilitating tribal nation building, Brayboy, Fann, Castagno and Solyom (2012) supported the formerly expressed concept that "sovereignty of the people's minds" is the foundation for other forms of self-determination, and as such must begin at the most basic levels including home and school (p. 15).

The recognition of the Native American right to choose the context for their children's education holds deep implications for the manner in which states, the federal government, and tribes determine funding priorities, teacher certification, curriculum development, and assessment practices. Culturally sensitive instruction is more than simply integrating language and culturally relevant themes in education-- it involves encapsulating different perspectives of how knowledge is acquired, and reframing the constructions of education to include such aspects as holistic inquiry and integration of

culturally specific interpretations of the meaning of relationship (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008 Fryberg, Covarrubias, and Burack, 2013). Brayboy and Castagno (2009) listed a number of policy shift recommendations to facilitate CRS implementation in Native school environments, including developing specifically designed curricular material, and ensuring local participation in these by hiring qualified Native teachers and enlisting the participation of tribal colleges and universities (p. 49).

Appropriate and relevant assessment methodologies can provide accurate data on the effectiveness of culturally sensitive programs. Lopez, Heilig, and Schram (2013), sounding a note of caution about the manner in which culturally relevant programs are assessed, conducted a multilevel analysis of the National Indian Education Study (NIES), which describes student achievement in literacy skills, and offers information on their "cultural experiences in school" (p .515). The first step was to establish a baseline from which to develop comparisons between the study's and NIES results, using NIES data and the outcomes of surveys and demographic analysis. The results demonstrated that the NIES inadequately represents actual experiences in school environments, and relies heavily on self-reporting and potentially inaccurate representations of the level to which classrooms have incorporated CRS. Lopez et al. (2013) thus suggested that large scale quantitative studies of student experiences and curricular supplementations might not accurately represent the reality of CRS effectiveness, nor the level to which it includes such critical parameters as "intellectual rigor, academic expectations, or quality of instruction," aspects that CRS must address if overall student achievement is to rise (pp.533-534). Without accurate representations of the manner in which CRS influences

learning, difficulties in promoting its effectiveness and enlisting support for the extensive shifts required for implementation will persist.

Successfully implemented localized and culturally appropriate pedagogies and curricula provide living examples of their importance in raising student investment and achievement. McCarty (2011) studied the Navajo programs at Rock Point and Rough Rock, both innovative schools with carefully constructed culture and language immersion programs that teach in Navajo and incorporate English gradually, while maintaining high academic standards. Test results for both schools have demonstrated throughout the years that this approach is successful and students outperform their peers attending regular schools (McCarty, 2011). Harrington and Pavel (2013) described a number of locally developed curricula from Hawaii, New Zealand, and Canada, explaining that the methodologies utilized for creating these included incorporating localized perspectives, such as direct involvement by community members in designing learning objectives and materials. While dominant cultures require Indigenous peoples to "justify the value of what they know, what they want to teach their children, and how they want their children to be taught" (p. 488), the programs described represent new approaches that encourage participatory collaboration between governments and ethnic groups, and modifying standards to recognize differing views of the purposes of education (Harrington & Pavel, 2013).

A small number of states have taken meaningful steps to recognize the significance and contribution of Native cultural values, by altering their standards to include these aspects. Carjuzza (2012) described Montana's "Indian Education for All"

(IEFA) Act, which directs public schools to collaborate with tribal entities in creating material intended to integrate Native content within the curriculum. Recognizing the need to "blur the boundaries between home and school" (p. 3) for Indian students, the Montana Office of Public Instruction directs educators to honor the spirituality of their students, describe myths and traditions with respect, understand differences in definitions of appropriateness when discussing religious practices, recognize tribal sovereignty, and relate the history of Montana as it addresses the treatment of Native Americans truthfully without revisionist omissions (Montana Office of Public Instruction [MT-OPI], 2012). The unique aspect of IEFA is its inclusivity, and its potential for heightening student awareness of Native perspectives, their history, and value systems as they become integrated within daily classroom presentations of curricular material (Carjuzza, 2012). In stark contrast to this inclusive approach, however, Arizona has passed a law prohibiting public schools from instituting curricula designed for specific ethnicities (Kunnie, 2010, p.18). This would not only forbid providing factually accurate narratives about the occupation and seizure of Indigenous lands (Kunnie, 2010), but also reduce opportunities to create culturally responsive curricula for Native American children.

These attempts to shift the definition of best practices for educating children from different cultural backgrounds demonstrate that multicultural education is more than education about other cultures, but recognition of the multiple learning styles human beings are capable of, as well as an endeavor to fit the method to the individual, instead of the opposite. Language revitalization and culturally based materials and methodologies are two of the three components that appear to have a positive influence on academic

achievement for American Indian children. The third aspect is their ethnic identification, which can buffer the harmful effects of stereotyping, stigmatization, and racist environments, some of the most difficult obstacles confronted by minority students in the United States. The following section reviews the research on ethnic identity, its development in children and adolescents, and its influence on student achievement and mental health.

Ethnic Identity

Theoretical Background

Explicating adolescent identity development entails operationalizing and measuring a process that is inherently mutable, and where experiences, contexts, social interactions and a constant flow of information help create meaning and guide choices. While social construction of knowledge might function as a *macrolevel* theory (Huffman, 2010, p. 7) to provide insight into the way groups transmit and preserve significant knowledge over time, systems theory offers a means for exploring individual interactions within smaller contexts. This more focused perspective allows visualizing adolescents as operating within a complex set of relationships and stimuli, each of which has the potential to influence their basic constructs and perceptions. Systems theory was a construct gradually developed over centuries to explain the dynamics of a fluid and mutable universe, where order emerges from chaos and replication occurs even with infinite potential variables at play (Von Bertalanffy, 1972).

The need for explaining complex system functions and their interactions with each other and their environments, has led to conceiving a *logico-mathematical* (p. 412)

approach that offers researchers in fields including biology, engineering and psychology, a means for explaining interactive dynamics and correlations previously poorly understood. Von Bertalanffy (1972) argued that open systems, while cohesive within themselves, constantly interact with their environment and are shaped by this intercourse and dependent on it, making boundaries "dynamic rather than spatial" (p. 422). For human beings, Von Bertalanffy suggested, reality becomes a construct built on perceptions, and knowledge "an interaction between knower and known… thus dependent upon a multiplicity of factors of a biological, psychological, cultural and linguistic nature" (p. 423).

The concept of dynamic living systems, which continuously exchange information with their environment, forms the basis of General Systems Behavior theory, which examines these interactions on incrementally broader and more inclusive levels (Miller, 1973). Miller (1973) explained the manner in which physical space might affect a system's functionality by defining its ability to access resources, while conceptual space delineates social interactions, as well as the manner in which systems position themselves within the environment they perceive; humans either create this perceptual space through observation, or acquire it from others (p. 65). Miller also suggested that living systems maintain homeostasis within their environments, while threats to this state will provoke adjustments to retain the ideal balance, force structural changes, or destroy the system (p. 80). This dynamic can apply to social systems as well, and appears evident when analyzing the manner in which Native cultures have sought to address threatened annihilation, or indigent children placed within a dichotomous educational environment.

Capra (1996) argued that the dimensions of pattern, structure, and process underlie most living system functions, and the fact that they are essentially self-governing supports their continued cohesion as they interrelate with others, or react to their environment. Pattern in this sense is "the configuration of relationships among the system's components that determine [its] essential characteristics" (p. 158, insertion added), while structure is the physical presence. The third dimension, which is process, reflects the living organism's unity, its enduring quintessence permitting it to sustain its fundamental characteristics as it adjusts to constantly shifting environmental factors (Capra, 1996). This is an act involving cognition—knowing. Capra's definition of living systems thus unites mind and matter, proposing that when a system engages with its surroundings and adapts to stimuli, each responsive alteration becomes a way of knowing, of processing data received during the experience. Capra suggests that the process is selective; the organism does not automatically respond to every stimulus, but modifies its reactions to sustain its autonomy and cohesiveness; thus retaining essential patterns and structure within the myriad of possible relationships. This description of adaptability might be useful for understanding individual adolescents adjusting to complex environments, constantly augmenting their sphere of experience, and developing self-definitions that involve selective integration of information from the social settings and relationships to which they are exposed. Included in these schemas are characteristics such as humanness, nationality, gender, age, SES, ethnicity, and culture, each being an inherent and essential part of who the individual perceives him or herself to be at any given moment. Each in turn will influence the internal narratives that guide behaviors and choices.

Constructive-developmental theory also posits a progressive aspect to adolescent identity formation, focusing on the way individuals construct meaning from the myriad complex messages of their physical and social environment, and how cognitive adaptation and evolution occur (Kegan, 1982). Kegan (1982) described the process as a form of evolution based upon stages of relative stability ("evolutionary truces") where self and objective world are in balance (p. 28). During this state of equilibrium, the individual is embedded in a perceived reality and fundamentally incapable of different perspectives, nor of separating self from perception (p. 31). *Differentiation*, seeing the world as separate from self, causes the dissipation of this evolutionary truce, as the individual enters a stage of redefinition and repositioning vis á vis the objective world, adopting new perspectives (Kegan, 1982). This suggests a gradual expansion of awareness of the complexity of potential relationships and an evolution of perceptions involving self and others-- a process that is unique to each individual, and whose pace is based on individual experiences and relationships, as well as messages received from expanding social circles (Kegan, 1982).

Along with family and peers, school becomes part of the psychological and social environments within which young human beings can create and sustain new roles and personal definitions, as well as learn to adjust the outward manifestation of these according to the surroundings (Kegan, 1982, p.162). Because adolescents spend a great deal of time within school environments, these become the setting for the transformational processes occurring within the students themselves; Kegan proposed that the very act of becoming educated involves exposure to new concepts and

epistemologies, even as the broad social environment leads to repositioning and self-evaluating. Adolescence is a time of discomfort and questioning, testing theories, and adjustments to new interpretations of reality and relationship; as change also involves emotion, each shift becomes a potentially painful accommodation possibly leading to withdrawal from feelings of loss and confusion (p. 170). Home, community, school and national environments can contribute to this dynamic on a number of levels, especially for minority students whose exposure to poverty, hardship, discrimination, or bullying is likely (Bishop & Casida, 2011; Watkins & Aber, 2009; Zyromski, Bryant Jr., & Gerler Jr., 2011), or who perceive the school climate as hostile or non-supportive (Fan, Williams, & Corkin, 2011). The question of whether environmental stressors inhibit adolescent proclivities to invest in socially or personally important objectives is increasingly being answered, leading to inquiries into ways to enhance their motivation, and encourage them to persist in developmental endeavors until they attain desired outcomes.

Identity development seems to involve complex negotiations with environmental influences and a gradual integration of those that align with social norms. Marcia (1980) posited that while identity is an act of personal positioning, it is also an active merger of perspectives, experiences, and beliefs developed over time (p. 109). To operationalize identity evolvement, Marcia (1980) theorized four levels that help describe the existence or lack of specific decision-making processes, and ability to commit to a position. Included among these four are the state of *moratorium*, where exploration has not led to commitment, and the individual might be considered in identity crisis, *identity diffusion*,

characterized by lack of exploration or commitment, *foreclosure*, a position deeply influenced by parental choices, and *achievement* from having completed the exploration process (p.111). The degree to which individual adolescents have moved through these states might correlate with their propensity toward commitment to academics, and their ability to function in a setting requiring a high level of autonomy and self-direction.

Phinney (1989) adapted this structured, multilevel concept to her study of ethnic identity development, in order to assess the manner in which adolescents of ethnic minority origin living within the United States integrated cultural values, perspectives, and attitudes within their self-schemas. She also sought to understand the effect of this incorporation on their coping abilities when interacting with environments dominated by mainstream Euro-American cultural values. Ethnicity is a social construct stemming from the genetic, cultural, or genealogical similarities found within specific groups of individuals; a concurrent aspect of ethnic distinctness is the otherness of non-members (Phinney, 1989). Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) noted that the social basis for these distinctions does not detract from their realness to those assigned a specific group or their need to validate the value of belonging to such; their success in doing so will contribute to the degree to which they develop self-esteem in association with this group.

Phinney's (1989) first model of ethnic identity development included three stages resembling Marcia's (1980) configuration, including a "lack of exploration of ethnicity as an identity issue" (p. 45), a moratorium level described as *ethnic identity search* (p. 46) wherein some cultural exploration has taken place but no definitive stance adopted, and *achieved ethnic identity* (p.46), characterized by a definitive attachment to an ethnic

group grounded in exploration and understanding (Phinney, 1989 ; Phinney, 1990, p. 503). Placement within one of these stages might help determine whether an individual's predisposition is progression toward achievement status, or whether stagnation and confusion are creating a state of confusion and crisis. Although early adolescence might be a time of relative ethnic identity instability, time and exposure to culturally relevant traditions and symbols appear to strengthen commitment and cohesion (Meus, 2011; Phinney, 1992). Levels of commitment and self-identified membership in a specific ethnic group appear to be tied to involvement in cultural activities, a sense of pride in belonging, and increased self-esteem; while many of these benefits are context driven; their effect has been verified in numerous different settings (Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011; Phinney, 1992; Whitehead, Ainsworth, Wittig, & Gadino, 2009; Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, & Guimond, 2009).

Parental socialization might initially establish the way minority youths perceive their ethnicity, whether as a source of strength or as a detriment; this sense of self is then refined by the social, cultural, and geographic contexts within which they function. The protective aspects of racial and ethnic identity, supported by socialization and cultural exploration, appear to interact synergistically with self-concept, cognitive appraisal, and acquired coping strategies; this dynamic correlates with adolescents' ability to confront the common problems of overt or implicit discrimination encountered in many social settings, and counteracts their negative effects (Neblett Jr., Rivas-Drake, & Umaña-Taylor, 2012). Biculturalism is another complicating factor for minorities living in a society dominated by a majority ethnic group; for Native Americans, this might be

especially difficult due to the fundamental differences between their cultural imperatives and those of Western European paradigms. Whitesell, Mitchell, Kaufman, and Spicer (2006) investigated the difficulties confronted by young Native Americans forced to integrate two separate identity frameworks that of their tribe and mainstream Euro-American culture, and concluded that this dynamic has important implications for their developing self-concept. Considerable differences exist between the individualist, patriarchal, low-power distance (relatively little perceived power disparity between individuals) American culture, and the collectivist, often matriarchal societies with which American Indian cultural beliefs frequently align (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010;Whitesell, Mitchell, Kaufman, Spicer, & The Voices of Indian Teens Project Team, 2006). This aspect will be further explored when discussing the effect of cultural mismatch between school population and institutional practices and imperatives.

The concept that building ethnic identity is a crucial developmental step for minority adolescents has led to inquiries in a variety of contexts, in large part with African American, Latino, Asian and immigrant youth. Very few studies, however, appear to have focused on Native Americans, although they have occasionally been included in sample populations. One of the primary obstacles to generalizing about Native responses or developmental stages lies in the great variety and uniqueness of tribal cultures, as well as the differing statuses of American Indian students who may be residing on tribal lands, in border regions, or in urban areas and thus essentially cut off from frequent interaction with their cultural practices. Self-identification as belonging to a specific tribe is thought to be important in process of developing cultural orientation

and identity among Native Americans, as the uniqueness of each tribe contributes to varying pathways to self-schema and membership within its cultural framework (Markstrom, 2010; Phinney & Ong, 2007).

Any attempt to describe American Indian identity development must include language, spirituality, creation myth, place, tribe, kinship, and historical encounter with White culture as contributing to their self-definition. Newly created qualifiers including blood quantum, or Congressional definitions of tribal status validity increase the sense of fracture experienced by Native people (Lee, 2006; Markstrom, Whitesell, & Galliher, 2011, p. 108; Paschal, 1991). For adolescents, these multiple definitional aspects are now in turn being modified by constructs that are radically different from the traditional identifiers, including multiple racial backgrounds and allegiance to sub-cultures such as gangs, leading to what Markstrom (2010) defined as *hybrid identities* (p. 526), a fluid evolution of identity construction incorporating cultural concepts from traditional, mainstream American, and foreign cultures. These variables can provide options for creative personal development and enhance integration into global society, but could also complicate the struggle of adjusting to an ever more multifaceted environment.

Ethnic Identity and Self-Esteem

The potential correlation between a well-developed ethnic identity and self-worth among adolescents is a research topic that has drawn increasing attention, but does not appear to have offered generalizable results. In 1983, Erickson drew parallels between social status achievement and feelings of self-worth rooted in a sense of integration with, and acceptance by, the collective to which the youth belongs, describing it as a process

wherein self-esteem "gradually grows into a conviction that the ego is capable of integrating effective steps toward a tangible collective future, that it is developing into a well-organized ego within a social reality "(p. 49). Newman's (2005) study of cultural identification and self-respect among Lumbee adolescents, however, seemed to show that while a relationship exists, it could not predict mental health outcomes with any degree of reliability. More research is required to understand the dynamic between social settings, ego development, and ethnicity, and their influence on feelings of hope, optimism, confidence, and self-efficacy among American Indian youth.

The possible protective aspects of ethnic identity raise the possibility that minority adolescents attending racially mixed schools might experience fewer buffering effects from their cultural identification than those attending homogeneous institutions, such as on-reservation tribal schools. Umaña-Taylor's (2004) study involving Latino adolescents suggested that the association between ethnic identity and self-esteem remained high for the sample regardless of the degree to which they were in the minority at school. This suggests a reduced significance of contextual saliency when strong levels of ethnic identity are present, as they appear to sustain positive feelings regardless of context (Umaña-Taylor, 2004). After conducting a longitudinal study examining whether levels of ethnic identity and self-worth varied over a 4-year period, Umaña-Taylor, Gonzales-Backen, and Guimond (2009) concluded that greater cultural investigation consistently correlates with higher levels of self-esteem. Both inquiries appear to indicate that if adolescents are actively exploring their ethnic identity, resulting in its consistent

development and growth, the resulting self-esteem protects against the deleterious effects of intolerance potentially encountered in racially mixed environments.

Externally imposed ethnic descriptors and implicit assimilation constructs such as state laws limiting bilingual and cultural instruction in public schools might be significant influences on adolescent development. Using a qualitative case study approach, Ek (2009) explored the manner in which a Guatemalan adolescent girl integrated and navigated differing definitions and expectations from family, community, and public institutions. Ek suggested that characterizations such as Hispanic, Asian, or American Indian could negate individuality and cultural uniqueness inasmuch as these overly expansive terms categorize groups according to predetermined norms. Another concern Ek addressed was that minority adolescents attending schools in the United States must contend with a perceived decline in the relevance of their native language, as well as a general elevation of Euro-American Protestant values and priorities over those of other ethnic groups. The study suggested that a sense of agency and autonomy could provide the necessary resilience to construct definitions based features selected from the multiple constructs imposed on them, and that this act itself can help counteract the negative aspects of societal definitions and attempted cultural homogeneity imposition (Ek, 2009). The individual choices Native youth make about adherence to cultural norms and the degree to which they choose to include those of the dominant society might reflect their level of self-determination and the manner in which they are integrating societal messages.

The investigation of correlations between sustaining strong ethnic identification, self-worth, and academic achievement among American Indian adolescents has included inquiries into whether these associations vary between tribal groups, due to differing priorities or role assignations. Measuring specifically for American Indian cultural self-identification, researchers have sought to distinguish a relationship between immersion in and engagement with distinct cultural practices, positive feelings toward self and academic achievement. The findings showed that any relationship between affirmative self-concept and academic success is uni-directional; while students of all tribal cultural groups showed a significant predictive correlation between self-esteem and academic achievement, the opposite was not necessarily true, that is to say, academic success in itself did not appear to enhance feelings of self-esteem. The level to which the sample had developed a sense of belonging and integration with their culture also did not appear to improve their ability to function in the school environment or respond to academic expectations. The question was raised as to whether this was perhaps due to differing cultural prioritizing—academic success is a distinctly mainstream American goal but not central to American Indian ideology. If there is a dichotomy between tribal cultural priorities and those of the dominant culture, a negative correlation between Native American cultural identification and academic achievement might be a logical and predictable outcome (Whitesell, Mitchell, Spicer, & the Voices of Indian Teens Project, 2009).

Other researchers have explored the degree to which adolescents should develop both ethnic specific and mainstream cultural self-definitions, to see the effect on

academic performance. Schemas enhance an individual's ability to filter, integrate, and use new information according to predetermined hierarchies and perceptions; when an individual accesses data that is deemed relevant and synchronous to this internal scale, it is processed and retained at a much higher level than when it is not (Oyserman, Kemmelmeier, Fryberg, Brosh, & Hart-Johnson, 2003). Racial ethnic self-definitions can affect school engagement, if students' understanding of their heritage leads them to feel that a certain behavior, such as succeeding academically, aligns with their own values, or with those of a group seen as oppressive or biased against them. Levels of in-group ethnic identification might thus affect the degree to which an individual rejects what he or she perceives to be out-group values. When adolescents can integrate both in-group and out-group behaviors in academic settings, they stand a better chance of meeting mainstream American expectations (Oyserman et al., 2003).

Alternatively, Fryberg, Troop-Gorden et al. (2013) have posited that Native youth who have developed a strong ethnic identity appear to function better academically when they are also able to meet teacher cultural behavioral expectations, including assertiveness in class, thus straddling both sets of cultural expectations. In addition, functional and intellectual autonomy, competitiveness, and achievement, which are reflective of individualist paradigms based on European American values, when imposed in the classroom environment, may be primary contributors to Native student inability to navigate the two belief systems competently (Althen & Bennett, 2011; Fryberg, Covarrubias, & Burack, 2013).

Depression and Ethnic Identity

The evidence that a well-developed ethnic identity supports feelings of self-worth might have implications for its role in countering the adverse influences of difficult circumstances, including isolation, discrimination, and extreme poverty, factors that many Native adolescents confront on a daily basis (Macartney & Bishaw, 2013). The rate of suicide among Native Americans ages 15-34 is twice that of other races within the same age group, and is the second leading cause of death for this demographic (CDCP, 2010). This statistic is a manifestation of the severity of the feelings of hopelessness among Native adolescents, and highlights the pernicious nature of depression and its devastating consequences. Depression can stem from an individual's inability to cope with extreme stress, and can result in avoidance strategies or high-risk behaviors; for Native Americans, contributory factors include distress from loss of traditions linked to connection to the earth, spirituality, and webs of relationship within their community (Sparrow et al., 2011). Social anxiety and depressive symptoms among adolescents have been also causally correlated with low self-esteem (DeJong, Sportel, DeHullu, & Nauta, 2012).

The role of ethnic identity development among Native adolescents is especially cogent if it turns out that it can play an important part in preventing or palliating depressive symptoms, and helping to avert high-risk behaviors. According to Sparrow et al. (2010), although there is a considerable body of research into the numerous contributory factors for depression, relatively little information is available about preventive measures, especially for individual Native tribes and cultures. One study of

Navajo youth concluded that a clear cultural identity developed over time by learning and practicing traditional beliefs provides them with resilience factors that can help alleviate and resist depression. Research on depression among Navajo adolescents is scant-- in part due to the complexity of the issue, but also because of a lack of understanding of the numerous cultural influences that might affect resilience and emotional responses to stress (Rieckmann, Wadsworth, & Deyhle, 2004).

An attempt to identify predictors of resilience and the degree to which ethnic identity achievement leads to positive feelings among Navajo demonstrated that when individuals have a strongly developed cultural identification, the protective result is not affected by place of residence, whether on or off the reservation. Jones & Galliher (2007), conducting one of the few studies focusedon Navajo adolescents and ethnic identity, discovered that both males and females show a higher sense of self-esteem and greater academic achievement when they have explored their cultural heritage and integrated their ethnicity into their self-schemas. Adolescents who have not initiated or completed this evolutionary process and are still exploring, apparently manifest a higher level of negative psychosocial behaviors, indicating the need for family and community to foster the process, and for researchers to provide better answers on the way these stages influence adjustment.

In another study, Galliher, Jones and Dahl (2011) sought to determine whether ethnic centrality as manifested by cultural immersion and regular practice of traditional beliefs and elevated self-esteem led to increased mental health and fewer incidences of high risk behaviors among Navajo adolescents, and whether this identification would also

buffer feelings of discrimination. The research also sought to establish response differences between males and females to determine whether cultural identification processes and outcomes are different by gender, perhaps reflecting cultural norms. Galliher et al. (2011) demonstrated that females generally garnered higher ethnic identity and social functioning scores, and that their perceived discrimination scores were lower than those of males in the same age group. The results also suggested that strong identification with Navajo culture and belief systems provided a distinct buffering effect against feelings of being targets of discrimination, and this effect persisted over time for both genders. In addition, those youth who were highly invested in, and felt successful in Euro-American cultural practices in early adolescence appeared to have more difficulty becoming invested in Navajo culture in later years, whereas the opposite was not found to be true(Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011). The study offered the possibility that early immersion in and study of traditional values provides a buffer against discrimination, supports better mental health outcomes, and does not necessarily conflict with the ability to acquire mainstream cultural practices later in life and become successful in those areas as well (Galliher, Jones, & Dahl, 2011).

Seeking to understand whether ethnic identity achievement and identification with American culture interact positively or create conflict in bicultural adolescents, Kiang, Witkow, & Champagne (2013) conducted a longitudinal study with Asian American students to measure their attitudes toward their ethnicity and participation in American culture. The study's findings indicated that even as high identification with either ethnic group or mainstream American culture produced higher academic

motivation and self-esteem scores, ethnic identity did not appear to increase over time. Sense of belonging to American culture did increase, however, indicating that adolescent ability to identify with the majority culture increases over time without threatening the ethnic identification status already developed (Kiang et al., 2013). Schweigman, Soto, Wright, and Unger (2011) found that for urban adolescents belonging to California tribes, participating in such traditional activities as sweat lodge ceremonies, drumming groups, and pow-wows appeared to have a distinct influence on their ethnic identity levels. The youths who did not participate on a regular basis, however, reported a significantly lower ethnic identification status. Conversely, the relationship to culturally specific activities did not appear to have the same influence for youths living on the reservation whose daily immersion in their culture provides an ongoing interaction with traditional practices; their ethnic identity levels were similar to those of the urban youths. The girls in this sample reported higher grades and ethnic identity scores than did the boys, a correlation that is sometimes seen and has led to questioning the relationship between matriarchal societies, assertiveness, and higher commitment to academic achievement for girls, although a definitive connection has not been established (Jones & Galliher, 2007;Theran, 2009).

Even as loss and alienation, low self-esteem and hopelessness are latent causes of depression, feelings of social ease and integration, instilled through enculturation activities, can contribute to optimism and feelings of hope (Kagan & Gray, 2011; LaFramboise, Albright, & Harris, 2010). The environment plays a crucial role in this process, if daily interactions with individuals with similar constructs occur. Hence, for

Native youth, living on a reservation reduced reported feelings of hopelessness, while living in a rural area isolated from one's tribe produced higher despondency inasmuch as this living environment generally does not host a blend of races and cultures, but can instead be fraught with tension between residents, especially if located on the border of a reservation. Native adolescents living in urban areas who interact daily with mainstream American ideas, however, appear to experience more comfort with bicultural concepts and report less hopelessness than those living in remote or isolated environments (LaFramboise et al., 2010). While enculturation is beneficial for ethnic youth, being competent with more than one culture seems to provide greater protection against depression and hopelessness than being adept in only in one's Native culture (LaFramboise et al., 2010) . Hence, even as identifying with one's culture is highly beneficial, contributing to positive feelings, self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy, multicultural identification enhances these protective effects.

In an effort to determine the role of biculturalism, discrimination, and ethnic identity on American Indian student academic behaviors beyond the adolescent stage, Okagaki, Helling, and Bingham (2009) researched how these aspects influenced college student commitment to pursue a degree . Their findings indicated that while Native students felt a great deal of pride in their tribe and cultural backgrounds, they were also comfortable interacting with other cultures as well; both aspects appeared to correlate with higher feelings of academic self-efficacy and self-esteem. A central feature of their sense of commitment came from the support and encouragement they received from their families and communities; this, in combination with their strong ethnic identity and

bicultural efficacy, appeared to counter the negative effects of discrimination and potential stereotype threat. In 2012, Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, and Solyom compiled an extensive report on research seeking to determine factors contributing to Native post-secondary success; overwhelmingly, family and community support, culturally sensitive programs, and collaboration with tribal entities have been correlated with higher student retention and achievement. Using an online survey methodology, Andrade (2013), sought to understand the influence of immediate and extended family on female American Indian college students pursuing advanced degrees. Andrade's findings led her to conclude that American Indian women are motivated in large part by a culturally inspired desire to benefit their communities and tribes, a goal they feel can only be achieved by being bi-culturally adept (p. 18). The close inter-connection these women experience with their family, both immediate and extended, and tribe functions as a resource that positively affects their reliance and sense of purpose, leading to feelings of self-efficacy and perseverance (Andrade, 2013). These results seem to indicate that the same factors that affect adolescent American Indian student ability to function within academic environments, whether positive or negative, might continue to play a significant role as they continue into young adulthood and enroll in college or embark on a career.

In a longitudinal study of adolescent members of a northern plains tribe, researchers attempted to establish whether long-term correlations between self-efficacy (the feeling of being able to change one's fate) and depression existed, and a possible connection between these and ethnic identity status (Scott & Dearing, 2012). Academic self-efficacy predicted a significant decrease in depression symptoms, and an important

relationship between the two over time was detected. The study concluded that academic success was important to youths on this reservation, as it provides a sense of hope and of being useful to the tribe, whereas those not confident in their academic abilities manifested much higher depressive symptomatology. Tyser, Scott, Readdy and McCrea (2013) surveyed American Indian youth in Wyoming in an effort to determine characteristics that promote feelings of strength, efficacy, and hope in adolescents, even when exposed to adverse living conditions such as extreme poverty or discrimination. The premise was that for American Indian youth, just as for adolescents of other ethnicities previously studied, the manner in which they envision their future possibilities, and the degree to which they feel empowered to affect these, would influence their capacity to ward off depression. The study also investigated whether the very act of creating personal goals and striving to accomplish these would predict higher depressive levels, inasmuch as this could possibly conflict with the collective nature of Native American culture. Several factors did negatively correlate to depressive symptoms, including the ability to relate to either or both American Indian and White cultures, feeling empowered to establish meaningful goals and possessing the desire and drive to pursue these. A strong cultural identity and dispositional optimism were shown to have a significant effect on depression; in combination, these traits support the importance of developing perceived self-sufficiency and confidence in one's ability to influence one's own destiny, as these support personal optimism, help adolescents set personal goals and develop the will to pursue these(Tyser, Scott, Reddy, & McCrea, 2013).

The role of traditional cultural values in supporting wellbeing and feelings of sufficiency can take many forms. Hare and Pidgeon (2011) noted that when Indigenous youth can adopt a culturally and personally significant approach to confronting such challenges as explicit or implicit racism, ethnocentric curricula or teaching approaches at school, their ability to withstand these stressors is enhanced, leading to feelings of self-sufficiency and higher motivation to persist in spite of these stressors. In particular, Hare and Pidgeon (2011) focused on the way their sample made deliberate choices to draw on the resources available to them through their tribal community, and their determination to persist in their schooling in spite of the challenges. The sample had adopted a warrior philosophy that imbued them with a sense of fortitude in confronting challenges, and kept them closely tied to the ethos of their ancient tribal values (p. 99). This might signify a positive influence of cultural symbols and the import of nurturing a close relationship to values that have historically sustained a group's internal cohesiveness.

Regular exposure to cultural practices and norms contributes significantly to personal wellbeing among Native youth, making the difficulty of access for those living in urban areas problematic. Kenyon and Carter (2011) proposed that American Indian adolescents might acquire and develop a stronger sense of ethnic identity when involved in their communities and participating in traditional activities; this in turn could provide them the benefits of a heightened sense of wellbeing and self-esteem, and of belongingness with other members of their tribe. Using a positive approach that sought to explore correlations between cultural values and psychological health, Kenyon & Carter hypothesized a direct correlation between ethnic identity and both a sense of belonging

and affirmative sense of self (p. 3). The study found a significant correlation between direct involvement in shared cultural activities and sense of community, and feelings of ethnic identification and belonging; this might indicate protective effects inasmuch as individuals with high commitment levels and strong identification report higher levels of wellbeing and life satisfaction. The key factor is the degree to which adolescents actively participate in, and learn about, their culture, as those whose identification is characterized as more diffused do not appear to experience the same level of investment (Kenyon & Carter, 2011). While the collective nature of Native culture encourages members to participate in this sharing, the individual must feel optimistic about the group's viability and future, and encouraged to share in their destiny if the benefits of this collaboration are to resonate and endure (Kenyon & Carter, 2011;Smokowski, Evans, Cotter, & Webber, 2013). This mutual commitment and sense of cultural value and endurance infuses adolescents with a hopeful outlook, creating direct links between ethnic identity, self-esteem and mental health (Smokowski et al., 2013).

A need exists to understand the centrality of race and ethnicity for adolescents, as well as how this informs their internal narratives; furthermore, discovering whether these constructs are more important to some groups than to others, and more prominent in one gender or the other, can assist in understanding relationship building between like ethnic groups and those of different backgrounds. Charman and Grossman's (2010) mixed method study using adolescent participants from mixed-ethnicity high schools revealed that the majority felt ethnicity was a major component of who they perceived themselves to be, and that they generally held positive feelings toward their own ethnic group. These

affirmative results were more numerous among female participants than male. Most respondents in the study were aware of iniquities against their group, but were still willing to coexist amicably with non-members whenever possible. While the study did not identify American Indians specifically as part of the sample, the consistency of the results across groups helps, establish the centrality of the concept of ethnicity and ethnic pride in adolescent identity development and mental health (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010). Kiang and Fuglini (2010) suggested that feelings of purpose and meaning are strong motivators for seeking success in essential activities and behaviors, such as participating in community events or attending school. A well-developed sense of ethnic identity appears to provide adolescents with life meaning and a sense of their potential role within their community or ethnic group, resulting in greater effort in academics or skill development, and fulfilling personal goals and community needs (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010).

An investigation into ego growth, ego strength (ES) and ethnic identity among Native adolescents by Gfellner and Armstrong (2011) sought to determine whether ethnic identity correlates with developing the eight ES qualities of "hope… will… purpose…competence… fidelity… love…care…[and] wisdom" (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011, p. 226, insertion added). The study found that strong ties to traditional culture elevated scores in the areas of loyalty, love, insight, and care, that scores were marginally elevated in the area of competence, but lower in optimism and resolve, with girls scoring somewhat higher than boys did in most domains (p. 230). There is some thought that these ego strengths might be tied to traditional values of community, family, and support,

which can provide a buffer against social stressors (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2011). A subsequent study by the same authors suggested that age might be a factor contributing to the level of ethnic identity development among Native adolescents, with older students having attained a higher status (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2012). It appears that the positive effects of ethnic identity development are greatest in youth self-identifying as traditional, with the next highest level belonging to those characterizing themselves as bicultural (p. 651). Living environments appear to have a strong effect on levels of ethnic identity exploration and achievement, as the cultural resources of tribal settings provides a source of information and support within which adolescents can openly and consistently explore their heritage, using it as a resource for increased resilience (Gfellner & Armstrong, 2012 p.651). As Markstrom (2010) suggested, Native American youth live in multi-faceted cultural worlds and must negotiate parallel definitions of self; strong foundations of tradition and cultural identification appear to enhance their ability to accomplish this.

While these studies have emphasized the importance of setting, family, and community support, and identified potentially detrimental factors in ethnic identity development and sustainment, yet numerous unknown variables can influence not only stages of ethnic identity development and their respective intensity, but also whether these stages are relatively fixed, or mutable once achieved. When queried, almost half of a group of Aboriginal adolescents participating in a Canadian study reported changing their declared ethnic status at least once during their high school career; the study found that it is possible to correlate this type of identity shift with academic non-persistence (Hallett et al., 2008). This suggests that type and number of identity shifts might coincide

with whether or not an individual will stay in school or leave prematurely, possibly implying that adolescents who have not reached achieved ethnic identification status are more likely to confront challenges with identifying a need to remain in school and pursue a pathway considered successful in mainstream society.

Exploring one's culture seems to support identity achievement and comfort with belonging to a specific group; the greater this attainment, the more beneficial the effect on feelings of wellbeing. Ethnic pride as instilled by parental socialization and other sources such as peers, the media, teachers, and relatives can have protective effects when adolescents are exposed to negative external pressures, including those potentially leading to high risk behaviors (Ghavami, Fingerhut, Peplau, Grant, & Wittig, 2011; Guilamo-Ramos, 2009). This explorative process should also include contextual factors such as historical events that have led to modern paradoxes; Wexler (2009) theorized that providing American Indian youth with historical frameworks within which to place their current struggles might assist them to experience better psychological outcomes when confronted by stressful events such as discrimination or the many consequences of poverty and isolation. Wexler noted that in order to avoid a one-dimensional focus on immediate situations, a more distal perspective would permit them to recognize that their experiences are best understood when framed within a larger social context. This could help them process the data in such a way as to avoid collective deprecation and feelings of hopelessness, and redirect them toward strengthening their own ethnic identity while contributing to collective solutions focused on personal and community assertiveness and empowerment (Wexler, 2009). McMahon, Kenyon & Carter (2013) found a high level of

appreciation for their communities and personal optimism among young people from northern plains tribes, manifested in positive comments about the way in which the community attempts to provide opportunities, including educational, tempered by realistic appraisals of ways to improve mental health outcomes, especially in preventing high risk behaviors among their peers. Using approaches based on emphasizing personal and community strengths would underscore the positive effects of traditional practices and support developing strong self-esteem through close identification with these values.

Ethnic Identity and Socialization

Socialization is fundamental to developing the skills needed to function within a given society. Berger and Luckmann (1966) described levels of socialization that begin after birth and become progressively more complex and inclusive as the child matures. The initial stage comprises gradual integration into the existent surrounding social world and adoption of the definitions provided by those who inhabit this reality, namely immediate family members (p. 131). These individuals, later to include peers and a gradually increasing number of non-familial actors, sift the information transmitted through the lenses of their own perceptions and understandings, emphasizing the aspects that they value and understand, or which they wish to impress on the young mind (p. 131). Identity thus can be described a process of amalgamation, where different perspectives and explanations of that which is considered real become integrated into the self, and adopted as authentic(Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

The next stage of socialization involves the gradual awareness of a broader version of society, one with which there may be only limited contact at first, but which

becomes integrated as the individual finds his or her place within the group and solidifies their sense of self and belonging (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). For minority children, the socialization process often involves becoming aware of the duality of belonging to a group separate from the majority and conflicting definitions, resulting in either having to choose between one and the other, which can involve withdrawal and rejection of either, or perhaps seeking to integrate selected aspects of the other (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Learning how to navigate and survive in multiple cultural environments is complicated by the difficulty of coexisting with individuals who do not share this situation and cannot fully understand its implications to the developing self.

Socialization, thus, is a necessary step for closing the distance between the self and others, between family and community, society, and the human arena, and as such is critical for identity development. Socialization practices among American Indian tribes include rites of passage during adolescence, such as the Navajo Kinaaldá ceremony designed to introduce girls to their roles as adult women , renew community networks of support and caring, and establish the direction she will take in her new position (Markstrom & Iborra, 2003, p.). Significant aspects of Kinaaldá include the mentoring each girl receives from females within her clan, and the impressing of feminine status specific to Navajo matrilineal society, which will shape her persona as she matures (p. 419). The level to which a community becomes involved in transitions such as these can influence adolescent identity formation, and provide an important support system for these youths as they enter social systems different from their own.

Being the target of discrimination can be either overtly inter-personal or experienced through implicit messages society transmits through its political institutions, including policies interpreted in such a way as to target minorities, as well as general acceptance of strictures that entrench disadvantages and attitudes unfavorable to minorities(Ingram et al., 1999). Whether overt or implicit, discrimination can have deleterious effects on physical and mental health when awareness of disadvantaged status and pervasive negative stereotypes develops (Brandolo, Gallo, & Myers, 2009; Dulin-Keita, Hannon III, Fernandez, & Cockerham, 2011; Flores, Tschann, Dimas, Pasch, & DeGroat, 2010; Huynh & Fuligni, 2010; Williams & Mohammed, 2009). Parental socialization during early childhood often initiates coping mechanisms that develop over time; those focused on developing ethnic pride and feelings of group coherence appear to have a strong mediating effect on feelings of discrimination and consequent loss of self-esteem. Studies have shown, however, that socialization designed to prepare early adolescents for potential experiences with discrimination result in reduced self-worth and academic achievement (Berkel et al., 2010; Hughes, Witherspoon, Rivas-Drake, & West-Bey, 2009). While the positive approaches to socialization (cultural awareness, ethnic pride) appear to have distinct effects on academic achievement, Hughes et al. (2009) noted that this form of socialization did not affect reported antisocial behaviors, leading to the question of whether parental socialization messages about cultural pride include implicit or explicit allusions to grades as supporting this ideal. Parental references to academic achievement as manifestations of self-esteem and ethnic identity might influence their potential realization.

Few inquiries have delved into the possible correlation between gender and the protective effects of ethnic identity against discriminatory practices in academic environments. Chivas, Rivas-Drake, Smalls, Griffin, and Cogburn (2008) wanted to establish whether perceived discrimination in school environments affected school engagement and performance, the influence of social-economic status, and whether gender affected the buffering effect of ethnic identification. The results supported the concept that school environments perceived to be intolerant affect academic performance, and that girls appear to be more susceptible to perceived adult discrimination. In addition to encountering prejudice based on ethnicity, girls are also frequent targets of gender discrimination, which complicates their ability to develop adequate coping mechanisms without a supportive social environment. Ayres and Leaper (2013) found that girls, regardless of ethnicity or age, use similar coping strategies against discriminatory behaviors, including avoidance and seeking social support, but that Euro-American girls confronted perpetrators, sought social support and talked about their experience more frequently than minority girls. The study also found a significant association between sense of worth and actively seeking social support and talking about emotions (Ayres & Leaper, 2013); this supports the concept that the esteem-building qualities of ethnic identification and community support can enhance coping abilities for girls when confronted with racial or gender discrimination.

The degree to which socialization processes initiated by parents correlate with decisions by adolescents to explore and integrate ethnic identity is important to determine the influence these practices have. Research has shown that adolescents whose parents

invest time and effort in instruction on their cultural heritage and preparation for potential bias from mainstream society have a greater sense of cultural integration and belonging, and report higher levels of ethnic exploration (Hughes, Hagelskamp, Way, & Foust, 2009). Other factors can also affect how levels of ethnic identity develop, including private regard (how an individual identifies him or herself as a member of a distinct ethnic group) and perceived public regard (the degree to which a group is seen as respected or approved by society at large). Rivas-Drake, Hughes, and Way (2009) found that even as private regard and ethnic identification are enhanced by positive parental instruction and socialization, communication about prospective discrimination and low public regard have an inverse effect, and potentially influence levels of self-esteem reflected in academic performance. Inquiry into whether this socialization process is unilateral (parent to child) reveals that while youth's early ethnic identity development is strongly influenced by parents-- especially mothers, agency is important—adults seeking to impart traditional values may initiate the process, but adolescent autonomy in seeking cultural information and exploring its implication often drives it. In addition, the urgency and significance of this discourse might be subject to specific group experiences within the United States , including placement within the national historical framework, and saliency of the ethnic group within the social setting or local demographic (Umaña-Taylor, Bhanot, & Shin, 2006; Umaña-Taylor, Zeiders, & Updegraff, 2013).

Other contexts and individuals also have effects on ethnic identification and self-regard among adolescents. Specifically, the community, including its educational institutions, provides social capital from which adolescents can draw emotional support at

different levels, and non-familial adults, especially teachers, are important members of supportive networks that can provide a secure source of trust and affection. At the same time, family members are adopting new roles bridging traditional and modern environments as external conditions create potential threats to adolescent mental and emotional health (Pernice-Duca, 2010; Reinhardt, Evenstad, & Faircloth, 2012).

Stereotypes

Negative stereotypes and stigmatization are two constructs associated with belonging to a minority group; research has demonstrated that the more individuals identify with a particular ethnicity and become aware of the affiliated societal stereotypes, the greater the likelihood they will be affected by such, including within situational conditions, such as test taking (Steele, 1997). This negative response might not be necessarily tied to an actual belief in the stereotype, but associated with simple exposure to such, resulting in feeling threatened and a consequent activation of avoidance mechanisms, together with lower performance in, or unwillingness to participate in, activities that qualify individuals by race or ethnic affiliation (Steele & Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997). These effects are not just limited to activities, but can also influence an individual's sense of belonging and safety in a school environment. Mello, Mallett, Andretta, & Worrell (2012) demonstrated that American Indian adolescents, along with Latino and African American youth, are sensitive to stereotypes about their group and the very act of mentioning their ethnicity results in a dramatic drop in feelings of belonging.

Adolescents who identify with a group perceived to be the target of stigmatizing can interpret social messages according to this schema, perceiving, for example, a

school's program designed to provide extra academic assistance as an implicit negative judgment about their group. Guyll, Madon, Prieto, & Scherr (2010) demonstrated that students with a high degree of ethnic identification, or conscious of implicit gender stereotyping, developed performance anxiety and developed aversion strategies when asked to perform tasks perceived to be diagnostic and that could potentially reveal a weakness that would then be interpreted according to the stereotype or stigma. This might indicate that American Indian students with negative experiences in school or other social environments can become highly sensitive to stigmatization or stereotypes, and react by avoiding situations within which they sense they might be evaluated according to these criteria. Native students at both the high school and college level scored lower on questionnaires inquiring about their sense of achievement and self-worth after exposure to school mascots and various media portrayals of American Indians (Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman, & Stone, 2008). Negative reactions occurred even though some of the portrayals were deemed flattering, emphasizing characteristics worthy of emulation, including courage and dignity, reflecting the nuanced yet significant effect of stereotype threat on self-esteem and schema (Fryberg et al., 2008).

These studies reflect a growing awareness of the critical importance of a strong sense of ethnic identity among Native American students, as it nurtures self-confidence and enhances feelings of belonging to the group with whom they are associated. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, a strong sense of ethnic identity seems to supply a rich historical and personal foundation from which to draw strength to meet the numerous obstacles confronting them when navigating mainstream American society.

Native researchers and instructors have provided information on effective strategies for developing these traits; it remains for policy makers to listen, and include these voices in the discourse on how best to address the needs of Native students.

Summary

This literature review contains a number of interwoven strands, each of which is significant for understanding the complex story of Indian education, and some of the reasons underlying its inadequate performance. Social construction of knowledge theory, which analyzes the roles of history, culture, social networks, and group dynamics in creating the stories through which individuals interpret reality, provides the framework for examining the assumptions that have led to the current state of Native education. Of special note is the concept of ideology, which Scheler (1992) described as *pseudo-knowledge* (p. 179), and Mannheim separated into two forms, the *particular*, and the *total* (p. 55), both of which constitute aspects of a way of thinking that delineates acceptable interpretations of reality, as perceived through specific, socially constructed lenses (p. 58). These distinctions are especially relevant when discussing the manner in which policy has historically been constructed to address, or deflect attention from, the needs of specific groups, and education policy formed to support the goals of political and economic systems.

Ideological thinking can provide justification for choices that deprive individuals of self-determination and liberty, as when it frames the other as in error and incapable of correct thought, thus in need of guidance--or complete annihilation. The degree to which the deviation is deemed threatening to the idealized system dictates the severity of the

measures needed to bring it into alignment (Mannheim, 1936, p. 69). These definitions serve to explain in part the complicated, contradictory, and shifting relationship between the federal and tribal governments, as well as the often-brutal approach to educating American Indian children during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In addition, they illuminate the enduring dilemma of implicitly assimilative policies that continue to impede the use of Native languages or culturally sensitive pedagogies in schools.

Other strands within the review contribute important insights into the predicament confronting Native students and the schools that serve them. The dynamic between the United States government and American Indian tribes has been problematical due to the shifting priorities of a maturing democratic system, and definitional discrepancies of such fundamental concepts as authority, legitimacy, and sovereignty. Inasmuch as Native American tribes are considered, and have been since the inception of the United States, as sovereign nations (Fletcher, 2012), their right to direct economic, judicial, and educational systems would appear indisputable. This has not been the case, however, since the Supreme Court's determination that tribes are "domestic dependent nations," and as such subject to the oversight and protection of the federal government (*Cherokee Nation v.* Georgia, 1831; Davis, 2012). The implications of this decision have infiltrated numerous aspects of federal-tribal interactions, and underlain the establishment of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and BIE, as well as legislation directing the funding and direction of Indian education.

The social construction of education as a primary means for transmitting social and cultural perspectives is a central concept explored in this review. Since the issuance

of the report *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, the United States has focused on establishing global technological superiority in order to sustain the economic hegemony enjoyed since the end of World War II (Becker, 2010; Groen, 2012; Mehta, 2013). These national priorities are inclusive to the degree that they establish the underlying justification for policies that mandate academic achievement levels ostensibly accomplished through standardizing curricula and authenticated by test scores. Language in NCLB (2001) refers to "improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged" by "meeting the needs" of low income and minority children, as well as "closing the achievement gaps" by ensuring a high quality education through reformed schools and accountable teachers, and that resources be directed toward the neediest institutions (Sect. 1001). That these same children have failed to thrive academically in this environment has provoked renewed scrutiny of the recommended methods in NCLB, as well as considerable criticism by the Native American community at large, whose children have not enjoyed the results extolled by NCLB proponents.

Native American students continue to leave school at high rates (Faircloth & Tippeconnic III, 2010); while dropout rates for Native are lower than those of their male counterparts (National Women's Law Center [NWLC], 2007), they are unacceptably high for a nation whose stated goals are to provide equal opportunities for all citizens. In addition to the excessively high non-persistence levels among Native high school students, their literacy and math scores have not noticeably improved under NCLB, when compared to the scores of mainstream students; this indicates an existing gap between idealistic objectives and actual results, and the need to reconsider how education is

constructed and presented to different groups. Some suggestions have centered on multicultural education, bilingual courses, the use of heritage languages as foundational to the education process, and culturally based pedagogies utilizing Native epistemologies as a basis for coursework development and presentation. The correlation between tribal sovereignty and educational choice was briefly explored in this review, insofar as the logical progression toward Native self-determination must include this factor. Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, and Solyom (2012) were among the few researchers explicitly discussing this inevitable correspondence, although it is implicit in most of the research conducted on Indian education and the need for reform.

Finally, the way adolescents interact with their environment, their identity formation processes, and the central role of ethnic identity achievement in the area of academic achievement constitute the final strands of the review. While it is important to examine legislation, curricula, and pedagogies, the argument for their relevance is made by connecting these to living individuals, and understanding how adolescents integrate the information received from social and cultural environments, as well as how this functions to either buffer them from negative messages, or assists in eroding self-esteem and motivation. The substance of the research indicates that a strong sense of ethnic identity provides this buffer, and as such supports Native adolescents as they seek to establish their unique position as citizens of distinct communities, tribal nations, and the United States.

The primary focus of policy analysis must be to understand the consequences and effects it has on those who must endure its mandates. In many cases, the only way to

grasp these ramifications is to initiate conversations with individuals constituting the groups targeted by legislation. Bardach (2012) wrote that defining an issue within the realm of policy entails stating the problem, followed by assessing contributing circumstances (p. 6). The literature review presents convincing evidence of the synergetic influences of ideology, and the incremental weaving of a meta-narrative in the United States of education's function as a conduit to enhance capitalist imperatives. The suggestion that these neoliberal constructs might alienate students and have a deleterious effect on their ability to succeed academically is important as well. This study proposes to provide substantiation of the consequences of past policy choices by relating the stories of Navajo adolescent girls who have felt compelled to leave the educational environment and to suggest avenues for modifying policies that contribute to the difficulties these individuals have endured.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Understanding the dynamics that compel adolescent Navajo girls to leave school before graduating is the first step toward creating viable, effective solutions. This study examined the narratives on education promoted by the federal government and the dominant European-American culture, and those developed by the Navajo people. The purpose was to comprehend how these narratives influence program and curricular development, school environments, and intervention programs, as well as the way in which female Navajo high school students respond to them. Inasmuch as perceptions created by school environments, including teacher behaviors, can strongly influence student engagement and motivation (Lawson & Lawson, 2013; Moller, Stearns, Mickelson, Bottia, & Banerjee, 2014), the way these girls viewed their experiences in school is relevant data for administrators tasked with selecting programs, and for policymakers approving and funding them. The most effective way to understand how these girls viewed their education, was to record their stories to derive the information necessary to transform the schools serving them into institutions they will perceive as appropriate, supportive, and invested in ensuring their success. Additionally, providing a forum within which Navajo administrators can express their perspectives would enhance understanding of possible divergences from state and federal positions, and help create solutions.

The first section of this chapter describes different aspects of narrative analysis, including NPA, which guided the process of deconstructing dominant educational

narratives in the United States, and revealing the social constructions that underlie these. The purpose was to develop a framework with which to examine the premises underlying Department of Education and BIE (BIE) decisions on Indian education, as well as those of Navajo education officials seeking to create effective learning environments.

Following this, I (a) explain how a narrative inquiry describing the experiences of a young Navajo woman who left school without graduating provided a third element of the analysis, and (b) described the rationale behind the design selection. The section delineating cross-cultural qualitative research methodologies included an explanation of how the relationships I developed with Navajo high school students clarified the need to understand why so many withdraw prior to graduating. Finally, the balance of the chapter provides a detailed description of the planned methodology and cross-cultural research approaches designed to reduce the influence of cultural bias while enlisting the participation of the Navajo people in interpreting and applying the results. This section also addressed potential validity threats, as well as proposed solutions to them.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question guiding this inquiry asked about the elements that contribute to the decision of a Navajo girl attending public high schools within the Navajo Nation to withdraw before graduating. Additional questions included how she portrayed the institutional environment of the school she attended and its correspondence with her home and cultural settings, as well as the way she would depict the programs offered, including their relevance. Finally, I sought to understand the way social constructions of education frame the narratives that direct policy development, asking

how these narratives, both federal and tribal, have shaped the programs in the school the participant attended, and whether these influenced her decision to withdraw early. The research design was a narrative inquiry framed within a NPA.

Narrative Policy Analysis (NPA)

If, as Kaplan (1986) proposed, "Good policy analysis is a demanding task," (p. 761), the tools for such must be varied and allow for a holistic understanding of the basis for policy formulation, the assumptions that propel their application, and their effects on those who are compelled to endure the consequences— positive or not. Kaplan offered the notion that predetermined criteria for judging policy outcomes might be counterproductive if based on inadequate assessments of possible contingencies and influences, or unrealistic objectives. The complexity of social interactions and conflicting goals suggest the need for analytical methods that go beyond formulaic measures of alignment between purpose and result; Kaplan noted the value of relating the stories behind policies, from inception to application, including those of the groups affected. Stories, as Kaplan explained, "describe events…which have already occurred…are described as having occurred, or that we predict will occur in the future" (p. 769). Their utility lies in the fact that they can be descriptive as well as predictive, as they illustrate, or suggest at, the synergetic interactions between individuals, groups, and circumstances (p. 769). To Kaplan, stories in policy analysis offer a medium for explicating the complexity of the problem-solving process, and the sometimes-unintended consequences resulting from these efforts (p. 770). Stories are flexible, adaptable, and provide analysts with multiple avenues to explore and understand the dynamic interplay between abstract

conceptions and actual results; their value also lies in the fact that they present policymakers with an accessible method of understanding how their decisions affect real people (Kaplan, 1986). To this end, the stories analysts provide must include the qualities of "truth, richness, consistency, congruency, and unity" in order to authentically represent actors and stakeholders, and enlist the audience's empathy by providing a clear window for grasping the multiple aspects of complex situations (p. 775).

Yanow's (2012) conclusions about the need for interpretive approaches to analysis raised similar concerns. Policy analysis has historically emphasized quantitative evaluations—such as benefit-costs calculations, to determine success; this approach overlooks the intricacy of legislative decisions, including the way localities might interpret them, and their effects on communities and individuals. Yanow argued that mathematical models typically assume simplicity, linearity, and correlations between purpose and result that rarely exist; instead, local understandings and applications provide better measures. Interpretive policy analyses use these aspects to assess outcomes, including different epistemologies, voices, and perceptions, thus covering a broad array of perspectives and providing a holistic basis for evaluation (Yanow, 2012). While this may appear as a move from clarity to ambiguity, it reflects a need to discern cause-and-effect relationships rooted in the complexity of human interactions and the innumerable variables that can affect outcomes.

Inasmuch as stories have a fundamental structure-- beginning and ending, setting, plot, and characters, positivist researchers have developed strategies for operationalizing and quantifying the influence of each aspect on policy development. Narrative Policy

Frameworks (NPF) provide a means for measuring the manner in which policy narratives are developed, their importance to policy formation, and the way in which they sway public opinion (Shanahan, Adams, & McBeth, 2013). Analyses at the micro, meso, and macro level provide researchers with data of how policy narratives influence groups, ranging in size from small and local to national (p. 16). One clear objective is to discern how causal mechanisms function within the dynamic of these narratives—how actions are justified, blame assigned, and consequences explained. Shanahan et al. (2013) suggested that identifying political entities or institutions as characters within the narrative, and developing plots that highlight their roles as either heroes or villains, could be an effective strategy for influencing public opinion about a policy's value or potential harm. Framing a situation as either the result of intention or fortuitous mishap resonates with the human need to establish causality for events, and formulate solutions. NPF methodologies include deconstructing the narrative to its fundamental elements, operationalizing the significance of each, and measuring their influence on public opinion (Jones & McBeth, 2010; Shanahan et al., 2013). Nowlin (2011) noted that shared social constructions solidify policy narratives, increasing their situational relevance and generalizability.

NPA represents a post-structuralist approach, as it recognizes the significance of story elements and of analyzing their roles and contributions, using qualitative strategies to address their nuanced, ambiguous nature. The foundational framework for NPA is the study of semiotics, which explores symbolic communication, and its use in constructing meaning (Boklund-Lagopoulos & Lagopoulos, 2004. p.1017). For the purposes of this

study, semiotics consist of *signs,* units that represent objects or concepts, *objects,* represented by signs, and *interpretants,* or ideas resulting from these. Signs are combined in an infinite number of ways to become concepts, and interpreted literally or symbolically. This study used the branch of semiotics known as *pragmatics,* or the intentionality behind creating specific signifying wholes in order to instill particular responses within targeted audiences.

Semiotics is useful for analyzing narratives when the purpose is to understand the conceptual frameworks informing them and their intent. Rather than operationalize the value of story elements within a narrative, and measure the influence of each on the intended audience, NPA uses the features of semiotics to unravel the strands of stories and counterstories in complex, seemingly intractable situations, where multiple truths coexist, often in disaccord (Roe, 1994). For NPA, the goal is to compare the perspectives of individuals and groups engaged in policy formation and implementation, and shed a different light by revealing areas that have not been addressed (Roe, 1994).

In NPA, literary theory functions as the primary instrument for deconstructing policy narratives into key components, and determining their influence in policy development. Policy narratives supply needed context for officials designing policy; in situations lacking predictability, these narratives function as guides for determining the ends, as well as the best ways and means for policy implementation (Roe, 1994). Just as all stories contain the same basic structure (beginning, middle, and end, characters, setting, and plot) policy narratives generally use these to predict outcomes based on envisioned scenarios (Roe, 1994).

If a chosen narrative proves to be false, counternarratives will better address newly understood variables contributing to the shortcomings of the first narrative, and provide the same projected outcomes (Roe, 1992). At times, these alternates supply apparent solutions but mask the actual problem by deflecting attention from its source (Roe, 1994). Dominant education narratives in the United States argue that increased school accountability will result in higher test scores, and that testing will help uncover weaknesses in curriculum and flawed programs. In addition, the notion of establishing basic criteria for deeming teachers as highly qualified is stems from the concept that student success can in large part be determined by whether or not the individual in question has a bachelor's degree in their discipline and is certified by the state (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Both sets of assumptions have proven inadequate for explaining the continued low achievement among American students. Furthermore, they generally disregard the influence of regional, cultural, and socio-economic factors, apparently assuming that one overweening narrative will adequately address the malaise affecting education in the United States.

While counterstories provide alternate perspectives of a problem, the validity of their claims is not always immediately discernible. Holistic analyses include investigating whether an opposing argument has the needed structure for a narrative, or is instead an itemizing of errors contained in the first set of claims, in which case it is a *non-story*, an argument with no beginning, middle or end that creates an asymmetrical analytical environment (Roe, 1994, p.53). Non-stories are useful for highlighting deficiencies, and while they do not present the necessary substance for developing alternate narratives,

they can call attention to the need for such a step. Roe noted that this might have the effect of amplifying uncertainty, because non-stories do not provide solutions. In the case of No Child Left Behind (2001), numerous non-stories have highlighted its many deficiencies, providing evidence for needed changes, but the uncertainty factor in education continues to increase, as effective alternatives to a standardized, mechanistic approach continue to elude policy makers and those tasked to implement the standards. This study also explored Navajo narratives of education, positioned as symmetrical counternarratives to federal and state claims of the best approaches for increasing student achievement and persistence, concentrating specifically on how these represent the learning environment for Navajo girls.

One important consideration when analyzing policy outcomes is accurate problem definition, especially the causalities that give rise to difficulties (Roe, 1994, p. 90). While the high rate of early withdrawal from school among Native American girls is an agreed upon problem, there is no clear consensus on the exact causes of such. Roe proposed a *network analysis* approach that would consider each argument and perspective equally within the larger narrative and seek to develop novel interpretations and directives (p. 92). Network analysis records individual and group problem definitions and causality explanations, to expose distinctly different explanations and the existence of possible correlations. The process helps to reveal circular arguments that can polarize groups, and deconstruct them for integration into a new, solution-oriented dynamic (Roe, 1994). This approach legitimizes individual perceptions as well as those of the dominant groups, and provides opportunities for presenting alternatives that can loosen the strands of circular

arguments and provide opportunities for integrating these into a different, inclusive approach.

Since most policies are complex documents that generally incorporate multiple objectives, evaluating the criteria used to determine successful implementation is a useful exercise. Roe (1994) listed the criteria of "efficiency, effectiveness, political feasibility, people's participation, and government responsiveness*"* (p. 127) among those that can be valuable for assessing policy relevance and utility. Discerning intentionality can be challenging, especially when personal bias can influence perceptions. Roe, citing Riffatterre's (1990) *fear of theory* approach to textual analysis, argued for *sociolect* and *idiolect* as tools to view the denotative, connotative and implicit social constructions of policy language, and how policy authors construe objectives and evaluate outcomes. Sociolect in this context means the linguistic representation of a society's myths and stereotypes as well as their perceptions of reality, while idiolect is the way an author uses language to convey social constructions of reality (Riffaterre, 1990, as cited in Roe, 1994 p. 130). In the case of educational policy such as No Child Left Behind, the sociolect quickly becomes evident as representative of neoliberal and capitalist ideologies encapsulated in language (idiolect) that enthusiastically promotes education as a pathway to successful careers and a means for enhancing the United States' globally competitive economic status. The sociolect of Navajo policies, on the other hand, represents different constructs on the purpose of education. My analysis revealed distinct confluences and differences between Navajo ideas and those of mainstream American society.

In this study, I examined the dichotomy between federal education policy intent and outcome and deconstructed the dominant narratives into their component parts to reveal sociolects and the perspectives they represent. I also developed a network analysis of the way federal and state agencies explain the underlying causes for student failure, and those presented by tribal officials, to determine agreements and differences. The nature of tribal sovereignty and its implications were critical considerations for this analysis, as were the influences of cultural identity, learning environments, and socio-cultural pressures on an adolescent girl's desire to attend school. The narrative inquiry based on the experiences of one Navajo girl supplied important information on these influences.

Narrative Inquiry

The research questions ask how Navajo girls perceive education and whether their perceptions influenced their decision to leave school--questions the study answered by interviewing a young woman who left high school under difficult circumstances. Using a narrative inquiry approach allowed the researcher a glimpse into the lived experiences of a young person whose perceptions of education were shaped in large part by her home environment and the way it influenced her ability to attend school. Individual stories are composites of experiences and social interactions that form perceptions and guide decision-making, and while the memory of particular sequences of events help to construct the narrative, their relation to each other may have muted over time as personal emphases shift (Clandini, 2016). Narrative inquiries explore three separate aspects of the participant's story, including the timeline within which it is set, the social milieu and the

location, creating a metaphorical diorama that can provide a glimpse into a particular set of experiences, or a detailed view of an individual's life (Clandini, 2016). In this case, the focus was on a determinate period of the subject's life, the individuals populating it, and the settings for the events leading to her withdrawal from school.

The hermeneutic aspects of this inquiry considered the cultural settings within which educational policymakers, administrative staff, and students function, as well as personal meaning-making processes. Hermeneutics in this context refers to an approach that repudiates the notion of fixed meanings in language, recognizes that individuals cannot truly comprehend the reality experienced by others, and acknowledges the validity of other perspectives and truths (Ramberg & Gjesdal, 2014, sect. 8). Moustakas (1994) suggested that understanding another's perspective would always be incomplete due to the dominant influence of personal perceptions and experience (p. 38). This indicates the relative nature and limitation of any interpretation due to inherent differences between individuals of different cultures. The study adopted features of transcendental phenomenology in that it strived to "eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment" and remained open to new interpretations and meanings, whether personal or gleaned from those interviewed (Moustakas, 1994, p. 41).

While the narrative inquiry centered on the girl's experiences, the perspectives and analyses of Navajo officials tasked with implementing NCLB directives and creating viable alternatives that conform to tribal imperatives were also needed. To this end, the study included interviews of Department of Diné Education administrators, and examining documents detailing alternate curricula and standards based on Navajo culture

and priorities. The interviews asked about specific concerns in order to supply detailed information on the Navajo perspective on education.

Researcher's Role

Language is the primary means for transmitting shared knowledge within a social group, and the repository for its aggregate of experiences, interpretations, and empirical data (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). Stories provide an avenue for expressing these constructs in a culturally meaningful way, and for placing one's self within these contexts. Kovach (2009) proposed that storytelling is central to building relationship and establishing trust; to accurately situate one's self within a study entails not only relating the circumstances that propel the research, but also "clarifying one's perspective on the world" and acknowledging that this influences methodological choices and data interpretation (p. 110). Personal accounts contain implicit elements of intent and sought-after objectives; relating my own experiences illuminates the motivation that supports this inquiry and clarifies its ultimate purpose. To this end, I tell not only of my own journey working with Navajo children, but also the path that led me to spend two years teaching in the Navajo Nation, and later in a border-town school in New Mexico that served Navajo and Latino students. More importantly, perhaps, I relate the critical reflexivity within which I have become aware of, and able to describe, personal assumptions about what constitutes a valid educational path, and how these insights have influenced the course of this study.

Travel has shaped my perceptions of culture and civilization, from an early childhood living in Mexico, through several years of traveling and studying in various

European nations. While there is considerable variety among European cultural and social traditions, there exists nonetheless an underlying homogeneity springing from common beliefs about personal agency and individual freedom (Nisbett, 2003). The concept of a mechanistic universe as described by Newton represents a fundamental construct of European cultures; the world is predictable, malleable, and destined for human domination and control. Nisbett noted that this objectification encourages a tendency to categorize and compartmentalize objects and ideas, and to seek causality and measurability in interactions between objects and events. As a European-American, I adopted an individualist worldview that encourages self-direction and autonomy.

Individualist societies are a global minority (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2010); their influence, however, has historically been important, most notably due to centuries of imperialism and colonialism, which functioned as vectors for spreading Western European ideals and assumptions. Althen and Bennett (2011) suggested that Americans perceive themselves as separate entities, not affiliated with any particular group, clan, or community unless it is by personal choice. The concept of the self-made individual includes autonomy and absolute self-direction (Spock, 1998, as cited in Althen & Bennett 2011, p.6). Lewis (2011) described Americans as often functioning within a set of linear paradigms focused on efficiency, timeliness, and adherence to schedules and agendas. It is likely that these ideas have influenced my subconscious thinking and the manner in which I prioritize education as essential to have a future where one is not dependent upon others for survival.

My first opportunity to work with Navajo students was as a special education teacher in a high school situated in the heart of the Navajo Nation. For two years I met families, conducted home visits, and interacted with Navajo officials from social services agencies. Sometime later, I had the occasion to teach junior and senior English at a border-town high school in northern New Mexico whose student population was primarily Navajo and Latino. The physical constraints confronting the Navajo students in this environment were considerable; most lived in remote communities and faced long hours of travel to and from school, circumstances that often affected their attendance and participation levels. In both settings, a considerable number of girls left school abruptly, never to return; these dynamics eventually led me to try to discover the reasons for their departure. While I had formed good relationships with many of these girls, I was nevertheless aware of cultural bridges to cross, complicated by a generational gap that can often manifest as distrust or reluctance to discuss sensitive issues. Consequently, I used features of cross-cultural research and followed suggestions from indigenous research for ensuring participant inclusion in the decision-making process. While this section outlines some of the premises of cross-cultural inquiry, I also address them when discussing sampling, data collection, and analysis strategies.

Research methodologies sometimes reflect assumptions based upon Western belief systems and implicit biases. Smith (1999) suggested that even well intentioned Western researchers must inevitably be constrained by their cultural lenses and the classification systems imposed by their society. Chilisa (2012) further noted that preferred methodologies have prioritized ideas on the superiority of objective data

collection and analysis techniques, perpetuating individualistic epistemologies. Bishop and Glynn (1999) explained how Western researchers distance themselves from the researched, ask them to conform to a pre-set agenda, and then analyze and construe meanings according to their own interpretations. This process silences the voices of those providing the data, and by excluding their perspectives, privileges the researcher's knowledge over that of participants (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Kovach (2009), discussing the divide between Western qualitative and indigenous research methodologies, suggested the inevitability of an insider/outsider construct, and that Western qualitative approaches seeking to adopt a decolonizing stance must acknowledge the limitations imposed by inherent cultural and linguistic barriers. Using unambiguous critical reflexivity enhances research validity (Kovach, 2009).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to completely divorce one's self from these internal structures; exposing and discussing their effects, however, can reduce their influence. In this study, the primary focus is educating girls, which springs from expectations that individual progress through the school system should culminate in graduation, and that possessing a diploma is a valuable asset. These statements of value come from Western assumptions and concur with those of American society, but may not correspond with those of the Navajo; differences between philosophical traditions about the individual, group relationships, and interactions with the environment (Smith, 1999) can result in differing conclusions about the ideal education. Smith (1999) cautioned that Western researchers might feel imbued with the power to rectify conditions interfering with the alignment of Indigenous lives with those of Western society. Kovach (2009),

however, felt that bridges of mutuality and dialogue between Western and Indigenous views could begin the dissolution of this monopolistic approach to scientific inquiry. There appears to be a correlation between the use of Western epistemologies in policy and program development for Indigenous peoples and their general ineffectiveness, suggesting that converting to Indigenous frameworks might positively influence outcomes (Kovach, 2009, p. 13; Smith, 1999, p. 232). The Navajo position was a critical component for discerning differences between their constructs and those of federal and state governments.

The association between researcher and participant also requires definition. Qualitative study models instruct a researcher to bracket herself within the study to reveal possible relationships with the participants, as well as potential biases and convictions, in order to increase the legitimacy of her findings (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer, 2012;Yin, 2014). Creswell (2013) described *bracketing* as clarifying the degree to which personal perspectives might influence analysis, and clearly identifying this inevitable lens. To this end, I interpreted the findings with caution, sought feedback from the participants, and included Navajo scholarly research to help provide perspective.

In addition to placing the researcher within the study, cross-cultural approaches require considering the possible reluctance of participants who might view Western researchers with disfavor, and the many physical and social obstacles that could impede their involvement (Liamputtong, 2010, p. 61). Channeling participant recruitment through the auspices of prominent community members and gatekeepers can facilitate access, and provide opportunities for these individuals to contribute to the research

process, enhancing community acceptance and support, especially when possible benefits are clarified (Liamputtong, 2010, p. 62). Other steps include enlisting the aid of culture brokers to provide guidance on approaching potential participants, best interview practices and settings, and appropriate protocols (p. 68). The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB) functions as gatekeeper and procedural guide;

Asking individuals from another culture to help in the research process involves addressing a complex set of ethical considerations. Kovach (2009) listed four fundamental ethical mandates for research in indigenous communities, including respect for cultural values, accountability to those involved, ensuring that the study have significance for the community, and commitment to ensuring the safety of those involved (p. 48). To Kovach, whose backgrounds include the Cree and Salteaux tribes, this meant ensuring that the study was conducted in "a good way," and met the conditions of honor and truth established by tribal codes (p. 52). Chilisa (2012) described an "ethics of care principle" wherein the researcher takes a position of actively seeking to ensure that individuals and communities experience tangible benefits from the research process (p. 267). Beyond these, however, lie principles recognizing the decision-making authority of the Indigenous peoples asked to contribute to a study. Battiste (2008) emphasized the importance of inclusion when developing studies that relate to an Indigenous group, and of their final authority in determining limitations and interpretations (p. 503). Chilisa (2012) suggested an I/We stance, based on altruism and "values that promote love, harmony, social justice, solidarity, and human rights," as well as acknowledging the worth of every voice within a community (p. 113). Freire (1970)

explained the importance of establishing discourse grounded in premises of equality that recognize the authority and legitimacy of Indigenous stakeholders.

The fundamental principle underlying these considerations is one of respect. Trust is nurtured by respect, which in this context is defined as giving due regard to another's perspective and behaving in a courteous and appropriate manner ("Respect," 2002). Berlin (1991) wrote that, since different cultures hold different values, hierarchies that prioritize one set of norms over others are unfeasible; a balanced approach recognizes that each group is entitled to their interpretation and grants equal access to all (as cited in Roe, 1994, p. 19). The intent underlying this study was to provide a forum to listen to the voices of Navajo girls and officials affected by federal and state policies, recognizing that their interpretations must be among the criteria by which to measure policy effects within their lives. This reinforced the validity of an analysis conducted to understand not only the intent of policy directives, but also their outcomes, and by doing so offer avenues for resolving conflicts or divergences.

Methodology

The data collection process was multi-layered, beginning with a detailed analysis of NCLB of 2002 and the 2009 Race to the Top Initiative, both of which reflect federal imperatives to increase math and English proficiency, raise test scores, track student progress quantitatively, and prevent drop out. In addition to these central documents, I analyzed and included references to the committee notes that supported the bill, reports on the success of NCLB and RTT, government report cards, and scholarly analyses in peer-reviewed journals. The second analysis involved the Navajo Sovereignty in

Education Act of 2005, its supportive documentation, the Navajo alternative measures of student progress, and a cross sample of cultural standards and curriculum. This composite provided sufficient data to depict the way the Navajo authority envisions the direction, purpose, and scope of education, and some of the steps taken to implement these directives.

In addition to this documentation, I interviewed two Department of Diné Education administrators, both of whom have been actively involved in developing and promulgating the educational vision of the Navajo tribe, and advocating for necessary changes to federal approaches. Finally, I interviewed a young woman who had dropped out of high school, asking her in a series of two interviews and one follow-up phone call about her story and perceptions on education, the circumstances that led to her leaving school and her thoughts on why other Navajo girls choose not to pursue their studies. The material provided a rich and complex set of data for developing a new conceptual framework extracted from the problems the two governments have tried to resolve, those confronting the Navajo people in general and students in particular, and those not addressed.

Participant Selection

A study's purpose and design drives the participant selection process. Inasmuch as this inquiry proposed to explore the reasons behind a specific population's choice to withdraw from high school as well as the social constructions that form the basis of Navajo educational policy, participants had to meet a narrow range of criteria (Creswell, 2013; Gerring, 2007; Lapan et al., 2012). Some variables were especially relevant, such

as the distance traveled to school and immediate family circumstances, including pregnancy. The primary (typical) criteria included that the participants be

- A member of the Navajo tribe
- Female
- Between the ages of 18-21 (inclusive)
- Living within the borders of the Navajo Nation at the time of attending the school in question
- Having withdrawn from school prior to graduating

Because of the sparse response to recruiting efforts, this inquiry does not claim to represent the experiences of a broad cross-section of Navajo girls who have dropped out of high school. It does, however, provide important insights into the influences that pushed and pulled one representative girl out of the school environment, and how the difficulties confronting the Navajo people might be reflected within the lives of their youth. The participant who volunteered to join the study met the basic criteria, although she was 21 and thus at the edge of the qualifying conditions. While she was a single mother, she had already left school before having her baby.

The second group of interviewees were members of the Navajo tribe employed by the DODE) engaged in developing Navajo criteria for curricula and assessment measures. The narrow range of criteria and the limited number of individuals meeting these simplified selecting participants for the adult interviews. Roe (1994) noted the importance of interviewing specific individuals when analyzing policy, in this case the primary actors providing a counter-narrative to NCLB. To develop an analysis that would

include a perspective on the way Navajo cultural imperatives are integrated into a state mandated curriculum, I initially attempted to include key actors from high schools in two target communities, by contacting the superintendents and principals. The difficulty and length of the approval process finally dictated that I reduce the number of participants to administrators from DODE who could provide a broad and inclusive perspective on how the tribe is addressing federal policies and outside cultural influences while developing a unique and distinct educational system tailored to the needs of Navajo children.

Recruitment Process. I followed the process emplaced by the NNHRRB to locate possible participants and began by submitting a request in writing to the NNHRRB for permission to ask agency and community members for authorization to conduct the study. I then obtained a resolution of consent from the (DODE) and the Navajo Board of Education (NBE). The next step involved presenting my study at the Chapter houses of both communities where I wished to recruit participants, and receiving consent by quorum vote. A formal application and presentation for NNHRRB approval allowed me to begin the recruiting process.

The most difficult step was that of finding girls to participate, primarily because of the time and distance factors involved, and the reluctance of high schools and community gatekeepers to provide names and addresses of girls who had left the system. Liamputtong (2010) listed a variety of strategies cross-cultural researchers can utilize when enlisting participants, including developing cordial relationships with key community members (p. 61), encountering prospective recruits at public events, contacting non-profit, and other organizations working within communities, and

advertising the study through church groups and health care providers. Rubin and Rubin (2012) noted that the very act of observing participants in their natural environment by establishing a presence and interacting with the community initiates the process of building trust, and that networking through mutual acquaintances is helpful.

To this end, I began by posting notices about the study in the Chapter houses and, with their permission, distributed flyers around both communities, focusing on places where potential participants might see them. I had anticipated using a combination of word-of-mouth, phone calls, and extensive footwork to promote the study and enlist assistance, as well as introducing myself to parents and families to explain the inquiry's purpose, the questions I would ask, and the manner in which the data would be transcribed, stored, and utilized. Because weeks went by without any responses, despite my efforts, I enlisted the assistance of a graduate student residing on the reservation. Her efforts included using social media, word of mouth, traveling to the communities and talking to Chapter employees, and asking her friends to help spread the word. This still only resulted in one applicant, who subsequently became the focus of the narrative inquiry.

I recruited DODE participants by making appointments to speak to officials directly about the study, explain its purpose, and provide information as requested. While willing to help out, most administrators had very little spare time for interviews, so I had to adjust the study to reflect these constraints. Consequently, I was only able to interview two administrators for one hour each, which limited the breadth of the conversations.

Data Collection and Recording

Interviews. The interviews were guided by the premise that sharing experiences through conversation can offer opportunities to become acquainted with perspectives that are "meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, p. 341). The most crucial element for creating an environment of trust and sharing was to establish respect, the understanding that it would be a process of shared exploration among truth-seekers, and that participants would have opportunities to review the collected information and provide feedback on all interpretations relevant to statements made. Interviews can be either power-relational or developed into non-hierarchical conversations where the interviewer has deliberately positioned herself as a participant in discourse, as opposed to simply eliciting responses from the other (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Symmetrical engagements shaped as semi-structured conversations encourage disclosure and engage participants in the creation process, using interpretation and explanation as mechanisms for clarification (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). Allowing time for reflective pauses, shifts toward different descriptions and interpretations, reevaluations of prior statements and tangential correlations are fundamental to this method; the intent is to create the sense that meaning making can be an iterative process, might require more than one session, and should be approached as open-ended to allow for collaboration (Bishop & Glynn, 1999).

I used the responsive interview model, which seeks rich detail and in-depth explanations to research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 101). Since this was a cross-cultural study, the first step to diminish the likelihood of miscommunication was to offer

having a translator or interpreter to participate in the interviews; this had proven invaluable during my tenure as a special education teacher working with Navajo families, when student education or transition plans were discussed. As it happened, all interviewees were fluent in English and did not require this intervention.

Other concerns directly linked to cross-cultural interviews can include obtaining the necessary detail, requiring using different approaches to ensure completeness, such as asking a series of *how* and *what* questions (p. 102), and following up on the details provided. This process entails delving into layers of potential meaning to uncover the truth and understand causality; Rubin and Rubin (2012) recommend asking *why* and listening without interruption as respondents develop their answers (p. 102). In addition, responsive interviewing seeks to evoke details of events by encouraging respondents to remember and describe them as closely as possible, and to diminish vagueness by asking for clarification, definitions, and encouraging specificity (p. 105).

The interviews were open-ended for the most part, although the questions were based on the respondent's experience with leaving school, and referred to specific topics referencing the research questions (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008, p. 215). This created a composite of the effect educational environments and programs have on a student's desire or ability to remain in school, as well as how culture guides the direction of education (see Appendix E). Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested that encouraging participants to play a part in developing topics for exploration could increase the quality of an interview; this strategy especially helpful in cross-cultural studies that include the barriers of culture and age differences. While eager to contribute, the participant's

responses were mostly very brief and defied elaboration, leading to an agreement to conduct a second interview to explore further topics she had referenced or that remained ambiguous.

The interviews with education officials followed the same premises of the responsive interview model. Differences included limited time allotments, due to their work schedules, and greater question specificity, since these interviews garnered data about the way their agency or office fulfills federal mandates, or develops Navajo alternatives (Appendix F). Before the interview process began, I offered the confidentiality and permission forms and set appointments for the interviews to occur. All interviewees had the opportunity to debrief after the session, going over the aspects they felt were important and adding comments if needed. I submitted the transcripts for their review, and sent them copies of Chapter 4 conclusions with invitations to correct and provide feedback.

Recording interviews is an important tool for this type of research, as it offers the opportunity to transcribe the conversation and a higher level of accuracy. Alternatively, recording devices, whether audio or audio-visual, can cause difficulties within the interview setting by inhibiting spontaneity. Liamputtong (2010) listed some circumstances wherein participants might object to recorded interviews due to cultural, personal, or religious concerns. Rubin and Rubin (2012) cautioned against allowing too much time to transpire between completing the interview and reviewing or completing field notes, since even a recorded interview does not provide the nuances that the physical interaction provided. Recording the interviews was not a difficulty, as both

groups are familiar with technology and did not object. I had the interviews with the sole girl participant professionally transcribed; this choice based on the settings, which were public areas with little real privacy or quiet. I also wanted to ensure accuracy due to the difficulties of precise transcription and access to instruments that allow for recording such important aspects as repetitions, exclamations and breathing patterns, which can be interpretive clues for analysis (Forbat & Henderson, 2005). I personally transcribed the interviews with the administrators using Dragon Professional transcribing software. Reviewing the transcripts for accuracy helped avoid omissions or incorrect punctuation; I also completed memos on thoughts, impressions, and comments that enhanced recollection of the interview itself and its eventual analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 191).

Sharing transcripts, while necessary in a research design that honors the rights of participants to review and own their contributions, can be problematic on a number of levels. Forbat and Henderson (2005) noted that unabridged transcripts are often confusing as they contain all the pauses and side comments, as well as the interviewer's insertions (p. 1116). In addition, transcripts reify positions held at the time of the interview, whereas further reflection might result in a renegotiation of personal opinion and new stances (p. 1118). A second meeting with the female interviewee to share the results provided opportunities for clarification and alterations to ensure the accurate representation of her positions. In addition, I reviewed over the phone the second interview, which was not recorded, and a transcript if the recorded phone call sent to her.

Field notes and reflexive journaling supplemented recording and transcription procedures. Chilisa (2012) recommended ongoing reflexivity during the interview process, including discussing embarrassing or awkward moments during the interview, evaluating the level of perceived relationship developed between self and interviewee, and personal reactions to the process. I used a laptop and outside electronic storage (flash drives) to record and manage data; these were stored in my home office under lock and key. Yin (2014) emphasized the need for careful organization procedures since these notes must be available for review when reliability questions arise or for replication purposes (p. 124). The processes for safeguarding interview data reflect the need to preserve confidentiality and respect for the individuals who have agreed to participate.

Documents. The Navajo Nation has encoded specific regulations on document access. According to the Navajo Nation Privacy Act (1999), records not deemed confidential or otherwise restricted can be released for public inspection given appropriate requests are filed and fees paid. Since the Department of Diné Education maintains a complete website granting public access to an inclusive collection of documents, this resource was adequate to locate the necessary information for my analysis. I used primary and secondary ranking strategies according to a document's direct relevance to the study and listed all within the references section of this study. The NNHRRB requires that researchers submit all raw data to the Navajo Nation when the collection process is complete and preliminary results obtained; consequently, I have printed the digital material and submitted it to the NNHRRB.

Data Analysis

The goal of analysis is to examine the collected data and produce evidence that will support and validate a study's conclusions. Insofar as this study was a narrative policy analysis grounded in interviews and documents, I followed Roe's (1994) methodology for data analysis in order to establish an organizational framework within which I could accommodate the results. This approach provided the needed data for developing the final results consisting of the central perspectives on education's function and meaning for Navajo girls and the Navajo Nation, and how federal and state policies rooted in NCLB mandates either have supported or detracted from these.

Roe (1994) outlined a simple process for developing narrative analyses, including establishing a clear definition of the problem and identifying the data necessary, developing viable alternatives that would resolve the problem, evaluating potential effects from applying these alternative solutions and weighing the value of implementation (p. 156). The problem statement argues that a significant number of Navajo girls attending public schools within the Navajo Nation leave school before graduation, and asks how the girls perceive education, as well as the way the Navajo tribe describes the purpose of schooling and its ideal form. The girl's story, those of administrators from the Department of Diné Education, along with documentary evidence, provided necessary data for the analysis. The sole participant's story was triangulated with the information from administrators, following a process where I gleaned central themes from the data to see where they were repeated within the stories told, and if so, whether they related to the same premises revealed within in the

documentary evidence. The sought-after correlations provided the needed material to develop ideas for innovative policies that can help address the dropout problem.

Interpreting the Data

Following Maxwell's (2013) recommendations of beginning the analysis process as soon as the data collection begins, I put in place a protocol followed with each completed interview after the note taking process. The first step was to listen carefully to a replay of the interview, and develop memos, comments, and initial reactions to the data. Memos provide a useful addition to field notes taken during the interview and add to the immediate reactions during and after the interaction (Maxwell, 2013). Following these steps, I initiated a categorization process in order to disaggregate the information into separate concepts and determine whether implicit relationships, such as similarities or differences, could be inferred, or supported with additional data (Maxwell, 2013, p. 106). Uncovering correlations between concepts—that which Maxwell (2013) termed *contiguity relationships*, entailed analyzing whether any event, idea, or category might influence others within the context of the interview data; I created a separate matrix for this aspect of the interpretation process.

Codes are labels that identify a meaning assigned to discrete words or groups of words the researcher has deemed significant for uncovering themes and connotations; they can be descriptive, inferential, or metaphorical, and constructed from perceived patterns (Miles, Huberman & Saldaña, 2014, p. 71). Rubin and Rubin (2012) cautioned about the need for consistency in coding, inasmuch as respondents may attribute different meanings to words and concepts; broadening the definition of the code to encompass

extended meanings is permissible within reasonable parameters. Saldaña (2013) suggested coding in two cycles, the first to disaggregate the material into broad categories, the second to refine these. The first cycle coding approach that seemed most appropriate for the material was provisional coding, which established fundamental structures within which to categorize the data, based on the research questions and the parameters of the study. Second cycle coding incorporated pattern coding, where preliminary codes are subdivided into major themes and interrelationships discerned. I used NVivo 11 Professional software to assist with the disaggregation, categorization, and analysis process.

Completing analysis and categorization and developing themes facilitated making associations and reaching conclusions that reflected the data and eventually answered the research questions. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) suggested strategies for analyzing interview data, such as finding patterns, grouping with metaphors, and counting specific references to objects or events. Rubin and Rubin (2012) emphasized the importance of careful analysis of the relationships between the themes that emerge, noting that these might reflect sequential occurrences, cause and effect, or even oppositional dynamics and discrepancies. The latter could signify the need for further data collection, including additional interviews to determine the significance of the different data. Yin (2014) noted that conflicting information, if included in the study and used for contrast purposes, increases validity by acknowledging different perspectives and conclusions, along with the possibility that these might reveal a greater complexity than the study encompasses, indicating the need for more research. The final rendering

provided rich, complex descriptions of the way the participants envision the public school environments currently existing within the Navajo Nation, and their effect on the choices Navajo girls make about their education, the abundance of details supporting the study's results.

Validity and Reliability

Redundancy, the procedure of evaluating and confirming the appropriateness of each step before proceeding, addressed some of the validity considerations of the inquiry. Additional measures included conforming to Maxwell's (2013) recommendation to develop a list of specific possible threats and steps to address these. Yin (2014) emphasized the need for clarity and conciseness in describing data collection processes and objectives, primarily to reduce possible bias, as well as documentation of every step, and operationalizing by providing enough detail to ensure that procedures can be replicated (p. 49). Inasmuch as this study was cross-cultural and a potential influence of culturally based preconceptions existed, the following list attempted to address possible threats to validity:

Contextual issues of validity: Insofar as each individual within the culture interprets their position vis a vis the school environment differently, and these contextual perspectives are difficult to ascertain without assistance, I asked for clarification from the participants and invited DODE administrators to review my conclusions in Chapter 4. The NNHRRB protocol also requires the researcher to present preliminary findings to the board after the study is completed, and to schedule a work session with the agency approving the

study to solicit their feedback and comments, to be used to correct misinterpretations and possible misrepresentations.

Language barriers: Awareness of potential connotative differences when two individuals from different cultures utilize the same lexicon dictates a level of redundancy and flexibility in questioning to ensure that interviewer and interviewee in fact assign the same meaning to words.

Imposed constructs: Wolcott (1990) argued that researchers cannot fully understand the perspective of the other, and that avoiding imposed interpretation allows for these variances (as cited in Creswell, 2013, p. 247). This study recognized the subjective aspect of likely explanations and conclusions, in order to alert the reader to the difficulty of accurately and completely interpreting the other's outlook, and the potential bias created by different cultural lenses. Reflexivity during the data collection and analysis process also provided continuous disclosure of possible bias and its examination.

Supplementary strategies for enhancing dependability included triangulation of the data from different sources. In this study, triangulation entailed the way each data source (the girl, DODE staff, and documentary evidence) provided different insights into the same issue (the social construction of education of the Navajo people), and permitted a valid conclusion. The challenge was to gather evidence without appearing to be collecting slanted data designed to support a preexisting conclusion. This test was met by including analyses on the subject written by Dine' scholars, inviting feedback and

comments from administrators, and including a broad range of background material, which, in spite of the variety of sources, consistently supported the conclusions. A complete audit trail and detailed, exact record keeping also support the study's credibility.

Ethical Considerations

The purpose of this study was to answer the question of why adolescent Navajo girls choose to withdraw from high school before graduating, and to develop a coherent narrative of the Navajo tribe's perspective on appropriate education for Navajo children. The participants were to be Navajo girls between the ages of 18 and 21 (inclusive), a sample defined as a possible vulnerable population due to their minority status (National Institutes of Health [NIH], 2005). The NIH provides detailed guidance and protocols for ensuring that vulnerable populations are not subjected to undue influence, endangered, or exploited by research, and that their confidentiality is protected; in addition, the Institutes mandate that the research benefit the participants (NIH, 2005). The section on IRB protocols and standards addresses these concerns.

Since I planned to interview Navajo citizens living within the borders of the nation, I had to the permission of the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB), which asks for specific information before allowing a study, including descriptions of the gender, age, and number of potential participants. Additional information sought includes the region where the study will take place, the manner in which the study will benefit the participants, the Navajo Nation, and the researcher, and the time envisioned for completing the study (NNHRRB, 2013). The application process

begins with a letter of intent, followed by a two-page abstract that responds to the above questions. The NNHRRB follows a 12-step protocol for ongoing monitoring and review of the study, including,

1. Meeting and receiving permission and study approval from community leaders and appropriate institutional professionals
2. Obtaining a letter of approval for the study from program administrators and the Division Director
3. Application approval
4. Presentation of the proposed study before the NNHRRB and answering pertinent questions posed by the board
5. Study execution after mandatory waiting period and permit to conduct the study obtained (valid for one year). Quarterly progress reports are required.
6. Submission of preliminary findings to NNHRRB
7. Meeting to give approving agency reviewer(s) opportunity to comment on data and interpretations
8. Concluding report, submitted complete to NNHRRB along with a distribution plan
9. Submission of all data to the Navajo Nation
10. Optional manuscript publication
11. Presentations to community and all supporting groups and programs
12. All raw data collected within the borders of the Navajo Nation submitted to the Navajo Nation Data Resource Center (NNHRRB, 2013).

This procedure ensured that the data collection methodology and interpretation of the results conformed to the standards established by the Navajo Nation, and the eventual utility of the study to the participants.

Institutional Review Board Protocols

The Walden University IRB granted permission to conduct the research under permit number 10-20-15-0092504. The participants were not members of a vulnerable population mandating specific protocols for approval from Walden University's IRB except as members of a minority group; this was addressed by the Walden IRB granting the NNHRRB primary IRB status. The agreement to access the sample population had to come from the NNHRRB, whose steps (listed above) ensure that communities and agencies have granted their consent to the process before its initiation, and that all consent forms meet their requirements.

Vulnerable populations. The individual recruited to participate was a 21-year-old woman who had left school before graduating, and lived in one of the target communities within the borders of the Navajo Nation. She was selected as being part of a uniquely positioned population, whose stories can provide deep insight into the manner in which cultural, social, physical, and educational environments interact and result in a decision to leave school. There were special privacy and exposure concerns to address when recruiting and working with this individual, to protect confidentiality. It was important that she felt that participation would benefit her and not simply be a situation where she provided information that had no long-term value except to the researcher. Insofar as this study presented minimal risk and was limited to interviews, the informed consent form

explained the study's parameters, objectives, and possible risks (to privacy), as well as the way these would be addressed to protect confidentiality, according to Department of Health and Human Services requirements (Public Welfare, 2009). The NNHRRB also reviewed the forms prior to use, and asked for some modifications to the final draft. While the study did not provide immediate tangible benefits to the participant, a scrutiny of the manner in which social constructs of education influence programs, funding, and educational self-determination for the Navajo tribe may prove beneficial to Navajo girls, if it results in developing programs specifically designed to meet their unique needs. In addition, the study will raise awareness of their situations and give them a voice heard by policymakers at the state and federal levels.

The interviews were strictly confidential and the consent form noted that every participant had the option to withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason, and did not owe an explanation of such. I honored requests to omit information and kept the emails requesting this to indicate compliance (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Situations involving revelations of potential harm to the participants were the purview of the NNHRRB, which monitored the research as it progressed by requiring quarterly reports and updates, allowing for appropriate interventions should they be needed. Identities have been concealed by using pseudonyms, although the participating administrative staff were notified that they could have their names and titled included if requested. Geographical locations were not specified.

Data storage and protection. The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board requires submission for final storage of all raw data collected within the

borders of the Navajo Nation. This data is stored for five years. Walden University IRB was advised of these requirements and acceded to them, as the NNRHHRB was the IRB of record for the study. During the time the study took place and until the final presentation to the NNHRRB, all written transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet at the researcher's personal address; access allowed only if approved by the Navajo Nation in writing. All computers used in the data collection and analysis processes had anti-virus and malware protection as well as an internet firewall ("Research Data Management," 2014). I backed up all electronic data with flash drives, which I stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home office, along with my field notes, memos, and other physical data.

Data dissemination. The Navajo Review Board (NNHRRB) required that a plan for dissemination be submitted for approval, listing dates, times, and locations, and that the researcher submit the data to the program named by the NNHRRB. In addition, the approval process required that the researcher "provide presentations to the chapters, schools, health boards, health facilities, tribal divisions, and tribal programs regarding the data findings" (NNHRRB, 2013, para. XI). After completing this process, and with the approval of the NNHRRB, I will provide the research findings to the departments of education of the states of Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah, as well as the BIE, and publish abridged versions in scholarly journals.

Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to understand whether federal education policies contribute to circumstances that compel Navajo girls to leave high school without graduating. The design included a narrative inquiry of a Navajo girl who had left school, nested within an NPA structural framework. In addition, interviews with DODE officials provided relevant data about efforts initiated by the Navajo tribe to align school curricula and measurements to Navajo cultural norms. The researcher reviewed pertinent documents from the federal government and the DODE website that detailed the strategies selected to enforce NCLB mandates and provide remediation programs for high-risk students. The objective was to develop a better understanding of the tensions between culturally disparate constructions of the meaning and purpose of education and the effect these constructs can have on adolescent Navajo girls, with the intent of providing crucial information for improving school retention among this population. From this, policymakers can determine the value of existing policies for achieving these goals, and the ongoing impact of federal mandates on student success.

The researcher is an individual whose background includes living and teaching in a variety of cultural environments. These experiences sensitized her to the plight of girls who might struggle to find an educational environment that provides the necessary support for academic success, while ensuring that their voices are heard, and needs met. After three years of working with Navajo students and observing the number who decided to leave before graduating, the importance of investigating these decisions became vividly clear.

Inasmuch as this was a cross-cultural study, and the researcher, while having spent time working with Navajo students, is yet an outsider, procedures reflected the need to establish trust and demonstrate respect for their traditions. The responsive interview model guided the process, and results were confirmed in consultation with the participants to ensure that interpretations were correct. In addition, the NNHRRB directed the process including steps on how to contact and obtain permission from community members, their requirements for data storage and security, and procedures for results dissemination.

Chapter 4 provides detailed explanations of the research process, as well as the steps used for analyzing, recording, and securing the data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this inquiry, I sought to decipher the social and cultural cues within the education policies of the federal government and Navajo tribe, and to understand the potential obstacles to fulfilling their common objective of successful, well-educated 21st century students. A close examination of the language, implicit messages, and unwritten stories contained within each set of policies provided important insights into the perspectives of two cultures living side by side, both invested in the well-being of a specific group of children, with different conclusions on the best approach to education.

This chapter contains three sections; the first offers information on the coding process, while the second explains the results for both the federal government and the Navajo Nation. It also gives the results of the narrative inquiry developed by interviewing a young Navajo woman whose story provided insight into the many obstacles Navajo girls confront when they go to school. The third section discusses the approaches used to ensure trustworthiness in this cross-cultural study.

Data Analysis

The analysis process began with placing policy documents into different levels in order to distinguish between mandates—initiatives that provide some latitude and encourage participation with positive incentives—and explanatory, formative, or supportive reports and notes. For the federal government, the NCLB (2001) as the central piece of legislation became first tier, while secondary documents consisted of legislation created to refine NCLB mandates, including Race to the Top (RTT) and those created by

the Department of Education and other educational agencies. Third-tier documents consisted of formative documentation including the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk,* committee notes, meeting records, and explanatory articles created during the development phase of NCLB and RTT. I have included a broad overview of the themes in *A Nation at Risk* because they provide important context for understanding the narratives supporting NCLB mandates.

The NNDOE website held the documents used for the second analysis, including the Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 and the resolution of the Navajo Council to Recognize the Fundamental Laws of the Diné (Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005; "Resolution," 2002). These papers outline the Navajo Nation's claim of sovereignty over the way Navajo children are educated and list cultural and societal priorities, many of which diverge from those of the Federal government. Also included were elements of the Diné Schools Accountability Plan approved by the Obama Administration in 2016. This is by no means a comprehensive analysis, as the Navajo Nation, through legislative acts and in coordination with education agencies, has created and developed an extensive and detailed set of criteria for educating its citizens from early childhood through adulthood.

The interviews included administrators from the NNDOE and the one individual whose responses served as the basis for the narrative inquiry. While these interviews touched on numerous topics not held in the original questions, each held data useful for developing a better understanding of the complex issues the Navajo Nation addresses. I

began the analysis by re-reading each interview several times, and making notes of the salient themes, before progressing to the actual coding process.

To expose the conceptual frameworks, I coded the data in two steps using QSR International's NVivo 11 (2015) following the provisional and pattern coding strategies as explained by Saldaña (2013). Provisional coding is an anticipatory approach where the researcher's own experience with the data, conceptual framework, or results gleaned from studies assist in developing a number of broad categories useful for a preliminary set of codes. Saldaña (2013) cautioned that because these codes might result from literature reviews or prior studies, their legitimacy might be limited due to preconceived notions (p 146). The recommendation is to maintain flexibility and willingness to change, eliminate, or add to the codes if the first appear unsuitable as the analysis progresses. I separated the legislation into fundamental conceptual domains to derive the narratives that helped to shape the policies. Other researchers have extensively discussed some themes (such as *accountability*), but these were used in new contexts and as such appropriately included. The process required reading the legislation line by line, and selecting sentences that encapsulated the primary ideas for specific domains.

The second cycle of coding entailed uncovering patterns situated within each conceptual domain. Pattern coding accretes similar data into units of analysis that, while taking into consideration nuances and inferences, unify implicit commonalities (Saldaña, 2013, p. 210). These secondary codes helped to identify emerging themes that buttressed the narratives I uncovered after re-reading and separating concepts by their underlying themes (Appendix G).

A Nation at Risk

The conceptual framework for the mandates found in NCLB (2001) originated in the report *A Nation at Risk,* commissioned by President Reagan in 1983. Post-war American military and scientific supremacy had not materialized; instead, the nation found itself competing with a determined Soviet Union, whose scientific accomplishments rivaled and even surpassed many American milestones (Johanningmeier, 2010). The American educational system, the source of the nation's *knowledge capital*, came under increased scrutiny. Public schools did not offer the rigorous programs necessary to produce highly qualified individuals who would maintain America's international standing (Johanningmeier, 2010). Inequality and discrimination also deprived a large portion of American children from reaching their full potential, robbing the nation of a potential source of human capital (Mehta, 2015). The focus was on the decline of academic achievement in the United States and its effect on economic competitiveness and national security. The report recommended raising standards, increasing time spent in class, improving teacher and leadership quality, and revising the way funding was allocated (Wong, Guthrie, & Harris, 2004). Mehta (2015) noted that the report's "inflammatory rhetoric about a system in crisis" (p. 22) was a deliberate attempt to alert the public about government concerns and initiate reforms centered on changing perceptions of education. The goal was to substitute ideas of school as a place to develop critical thinking skills, explore personal interests, or acquire vocational training, with school as a pathway to American economic dominance (Mehta, 2015).

A Nation at Risk became a story not only of children as *knowledgeable human capital* – a national resource of potential workers capable of competing in the global economy (Johanningmeier, 2010, p. 350), but also of a need for a wiser, almost omniscient entity to direct and guide the public. Government as moral guide pervaded the report, notifying parents of their responsibility to demonstrate the qualities sought in their children: hard work, commitment, and life-long learning (*A Nation at Risk*, 1983). Students, meanwhile, must actively pursue opportunities to learn, develop self-discipline, and hold high personal expectations. Broadening access to the poor and minorities was a commonsense measure that would serve society's progress as it provided for the individual. The authors used persuasive language to garner public support for their position: observations about the increasing knowledge divide between the scientific community and the general population were either *chilling or sobering,* and the state of contemporary curricula and programs was so *shoddy* and *frustrating* that education leaders were *losing hope*. To correct this, the report exhorted the public to take the task of *rebuilding* public education seriously, and to *commit to lifelong learning* as preparation for a future where realigning skillsets would become a fact of life. The citizenry's mood was presented as *steadfast in their belief* of the central role of education in a nations' prosperity, *impatient* with the current state of affairs, and *supportive* of extensive reform; they *knew in their bones* that the survival of the America as they perceived it depended on the government assuming the responsibility of initiating the needed changes.

Viewing the report through a poststructuralist lens helps to clarify the way its ideas initiated a move toward standardization, emphases on math and science, and the

practical aspects of education. Poststructuralism examines the way language and discourse not only reflect existing sociopolitical and cultural constructs, but also help to create them (Allen, 2010). By the time NCLB (2001) came along, the assumptions implicit in *A Nation at Risk* had been widely accepted. The conversation was not whether these conclusions were correct, or perhaps even damaging, but how they could be best implemented into curricula and promoted by politicians and the media. The language and conceptual domains of NCLB and subsequent legislation and initiatives offer evidence of this new education narrative. The goal of my analysis was to uncover the semiotics woven within the texts of federal and tribal policies, including the *signs* representing aspects of *signifying wholes* or conceptual domains, the *objects* represented by these signs, and the *interpretants,* or inferences derived from the signs (Boklund-Lagopoulos & Lagopoulos, 2004). As noted in Chapter 3, the purpose was to examine the rational aspects of using *signifying wholes* as mechanisms for instilling a sought-after response within an audience, and understand how this would affect groups who only marginally participate in the majority culture.

NCLB

The language of the act is relatively clear and unambiguous, facilitating aggregating groups of words into initial sets as conceptual domains. The extensive literature on NCLB already in existence provided basic themes that were added to, resulting in 22 provisional topics and 10 subtopics that elaborated on these. Table 2 lists the conceptual domains and their number of incidences within the legislation. Broad topics such as *accountability* (*f* =95) include implicit references to reporting and

processes for publicizing data on school performance. Other concepts, such as *challenging state curriculum standards* (*f* =103) are frameworks designed to guide curriculum design and instructional strategies, offering schools and students a means to raise achievement. The preliminary coding replicated the exact phrasing in order to reveal the underlying ways in which the language itself became a means for promoting socially important ideas in different contexts (Riffaterre, 1990, p. 930).

Table 2

Primary conceptual domains in NCLB

Conceptual Domain	Number of references
Academic achievement	118
Accountability	95
Adequate Yearly Progress	45
Advanced placement	5
Assessments	130
Business references (includes vocational training)	46
Challenging academic standards	103
Civics, citizenship, Economics	22
Dropout	10
English acquisition or proficiency	65
Extracurricular programs	32
Girls, gender equity	8
Immigrant children	8
Low income	57
Math/science	17
Technology	44
Measures	78
Native American, Alaska Native/ Native Hawaiian	52
Parental involvement/choice	84
School improvement	45
Scientifically based research	79
Teacher training/qualification	115

These provisional codes permitted an initial understanding of the instructions deemed most important by NCLB authors. An overview of the conceptual hierarchy

indicated that the items most frequently referenced were, in numerical order, assessments (*f* =130), academic achievement (*f* =118), teacher training and qualifications (*f* =115), and challenging academic standards (*f* =103). Following in importance are accountability (*f* =95), parental involvement and choice *(f* =84*),* scientifically based research (*f* =79*),* and measures (*f* =78*).* The lowest in number include girls and gender equity (*f* =8), immigrant children (*f* =8), and finally, advanced placement (*f* =5). Although these numbers only reflect a preliminary aggregation of occurrences within the legislation, their frequency reflects the applicability of the concepts within different domains. Assessments, for example, are referenced when discussing English proficiency, school improvement, and teacher qualifications, indicating their usefulness for demonstrating current states of affairs and providing a pathway for correction.

The number of references determined ordinal position in the hierarchy; hence, under academic achievement (*f* =118), the most frequently referenced concept was strategies for improving achievement (*f* =46), including curricular changes, more time in the classroom, encouraging parental involvement, and providing teachers with quality professional development. Second in order of importance were federal and state expectations about achievement (*f* =40), including directives for developing widely accepted achievement levels and establish standards, ensuring that all students be taught the same basic skills, and timelines for improvement

The next step was to organize the themes into a matrix (Table 3). This entailed reading the material for a third time to ensure the correct grouping for each of the references, and then summarizing for clarity. This step refined the domains, eliminated

redundancies and revised definitions derived from inferences. In their discussion of matrix-creation, Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) made note that choosing the data to include involves a considerable amount of information sorting and reduction, processes that can influence the quality of the interpretations drawn from the matrix.

Table 3

Pattern coding for NCLB Conceptual Domains

Conceptual Domains	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary	Quinary	Senary
Academic achievement	Improving	Expectations	Equity	Proficiency	Graduation	Remediation
Accountability	Measures	Consequences	As principle			
Advanced placement	Strategies to increase AP	State responsibilities				
Adequate yearly progress	Definitions, Consequences	Meeting AYP goals	Assessments	Remediation	Parent options	
Assessments	Quality and purpose	Student populations	Standardized	And AYP	Aligning with standards	Reporting results
Business and employment	Training and mentoring	Vocational and technical	Desirable traits	Partnerships		
Challenging academic standards	CAS as objectives	English proficiency and CAS	CAS and at-risk students	CAS and school improvement	CAS and teacher qualifications	Aligning CAS with assessments
Civics and Economics	Correlations					
Dropout	Targeted populations	Effective programs	Encourage retention			
English proficiency (EP)	Purposes of funding for EP	Language instruction	Diverse approaches to increase EP	Measuring results of EP programs	Parental inclusion	Data on LEP populations
Extra-curricular programs	At-risk populations	Improving literacy rates	Enrichment			
Girls	Inequity in education	Creating opportunities				
Immigrant Children	State and federal level approaches					

(*table continues)*

Conceptual domains	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary	Quinary	Senary
Local authority (LA)	Importance of LA					
Low income (LI)	Ratio of LI to regular pops.	Eligibility and funding	Addressing needs			
Math, Science, Technology	STEM and academic achievement	Teacher training and certification	Partnerships			
Measurable objectives	Using measurement	Reliability				
Native populations	Culture	BIA	Languages			
Parents	Participants	Notifying	Choice			
School improvement	Identifying schools	Funding	Strategies	School reform		
Scientifically based research	Varied uses	In instruction	In curricula	Recruiting	Professional development	
Teacher qualifications	Standards for qualification	Highly qualified (HQ)	Para-professional			

Analysis of NCLB themes. This analysis rested on the premise that if a specific concept or term appeared in multiple contexts and was the supporting premise for several mandates, its prominence became the basis for understanding the narratives shaping the policy. Congressional committee reports offered the rationale for each proposal, a critical component for understanding the implicit narratives.

The most prominent conceptual domain within the legislation was *assessments*, which essentially drove the search for quality in education and evaluating whether students were meeting established standards. Teachers have traditionally used a variety of strategies to determine whether students are mastering material, including authentic

assessment methodologies that utilize context, observation, and individual interventions to assist students in developing desired skillsets (Kielty, LaRocco, & Casell, 2009). The concept that knowledge is accumulated in discrete bits from the simple to the complex, must be imparted sequentially and didactically, and its acquisition measured objectively, have influenced testing norms and standardization (as reflected in NCLB) (Shepard, 2009). The use of psychometric modeling in assessments has contributed to the narrative that student learning is measurable and results used to determine levels of task mastery and proficiency. The basis for this approach rests on an assumption that the degree to which a student understands and has mastered material will determine their performance on selective tasks designed to measure the way students learn and use information (Mislevy, Wilson, Ercikan, & Chudowsky, 2001).

Standardization addresses the issues of reliability, validity and comparability by collecting identical data from each student and using the same processes, validated by large-scale statistical analyses, to measure skill levels (Mislevy, Wilson, Ercikan, & Chudowsky, 2001). Factors such as culture, mother tongue, and environment can influence these measurements, resulting in erroneous assumptions about student capabilities, indicating the need for alternate assessments (p. 13). The use of psychometrics in measuring student achievement provides an avenue for large-scale (statewide or even nationwide) assessments, and developing reports claiming to reflect the level to which American children meet projected outcomes.

In NCLB, assessment results assumed a central role in program development and school funding, with the underlying goal of raising student achievement. State standards

were to guide curricula development and be validated by standardized test scores, while student progress was to be determined by establishing baseline scores, with annual measures of improvement centered on subsequent test results. Longitudinal studies using test data would also provide more generalized information on student enrollment, graduation rates, and state adherence to NCLB mandates. Aligning curricula and assessments seemed the best way to improve student achievement and school performance, and test results the most dependable pathway to holding schools accountable (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001; NCLB, 2001). Annual assessments would ensure applying timely interventions before problems became too severe, but were just one of many strategies in school improvement plans (Rust, E. as cited in H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, p. 271). The broadening role of assessments reflected the narrative of government control of educational processes and the use of test scores as a way to justify interventions. This stance rationalized the idea that opportunities for American children to succeed in the modern economy depended on government interventions (Representative George Miller, D-California, as cited in Baron, 2014, p. 11).

Academic achievement was another primary concept in the legislation, as the given objective of most measures. The somewhat ambiguous term was framed by expectations, notably that all students are able to meet *challenging state standards and content requirements* (NCLB, 2001). The act purported to close an *achievement gap* between low income and the rest of the student population, calling for strategies to meet this objective. These included inter-agency coordination, technical assistance for schools needing extra guidance, integrating technology into the curriculum, teacher training,

reducing class size, increasing the number of hours in class, and providing for budgetary flexibility to ensure that Title I programs are adequately funded. Insofar as learning is contextual, cumulative, and difficult to quantify, academic achievement as a measurable outcome must by definition be tied to some form of assessment, so direction was given to develop *widely accepted achievement levels* that could be measured consistently (NCLB, 2001).

Armstrong (2006) described the overriding focus on achievement as an *academic achievement discourse* that has permeated the field of education and become incrementally more urgent (para.7). In this sense, discourse refers to informational exchanges stemming from commonly held paradigms and definitions, so that academic achievement as a discourse has become a set of beliefs about educational outcomes assumed to be absolute and that can be encoded into law. Armstrong explained that the term *academic achievement discourse* was an inclusive designation describing the prevailing ideology that the purpose of education is essentially for students to master the material in the core curriculum and demonstrate proficiency with test scores (Armstrong, 2006, para. 8).

NCLB established the expectation that academic achievement would gradually improve until every student tested at the proficient level in core academic topics by 2014 (NCLB, 2001). While this was an anticipated result based on confidence in the effectiveness of methods buttressed by scientifically based research, addressed later in this chapter, time has not supported this sanguine conclusion. In 2008, the Secretary of Education issued *A Nation Accountable*, cautioning that the threat to improving student

achievement had not measurably lessened, warranting steps to correct a deteriorating situation. The 2013 NAEP report card, while couched in optimistic language and large colorful graphics that emphasize improvements, still shows the dismal result of 64% of eighth graders not proficient in mathematics or reading, the two primary measures of academic achievement for elementary students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Even the additional flexibility granted states to develop programs that target struggling learners and provide more individualized instruction and assessment have not provided the sought after results (*No Child Left Behind: Early Lessons* , 2013)

Academic achievement and assessments constituted two aspects of a trio of basic approaches designed to reform education in the US; the third was accountability, whether to parents, communities, or state and federal agencies. Mulgan (2000) wrote that the concept of accountability implies one group asserting authority over another and expecting a demonstration of cooperation in meeting established standards (p. 555); he added, though, that the word has acquired a variety of complex meanings in public administration, and thus context is an important factor in its use. In NCLB, accountability appeared to have dual meanings, including officials responding to community and parental queries on the role and purpose of education, with their concerns and criticisms, by providing explanations and justifications of the programs and choices made.

The other, more conventional meaning is that public officials are expected to behave in accordance with their superiors' wishes under fear of penalties, which in the case of NCLB can mean loss of employment and school closures. The narrative of NCLB presented the latter perspective: students are being left behind, and since the federal

government has assumed the task to correct this state of affairs, it must put in place measures to reward the successful and sanction ineffectiveness. Using business operations as framework, NCLB authors clarified that successful enterprises give those on the highest echelons considerable latitude, but also hold them accountable for the outcomes (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, p. 265). The goal was to ensure that communities and parents receive high returns on their investment in their children's education, giving the government considerable latitude in determining the consequences for failure. Anderson (2005) noted that three primary types of accountability systems, regulation, establishing professional standards, and creating frameworks for achieving specific outcomes, are now integral components of government educational frameworks internationally, and reflect the new industrial perception of education. This trend is due in part to shifting the blame for student failure on social conditions to dysfunctional school systems, and anticipating that carefully crafted, multi-layered accountability methods will not only improve schools but also help resolve the wide achievement gaps between students low on the socio-economic scale and their wealthier peers (Anderson, 2005).

Parental choice was woven into the fabric of NCLB accountability, especially when addressing assessments, standards, and school improvement. Parents and other taxpayers needed data to help them hold their child's school accountable (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, p.275). The narrative of institutional and personal accountability to parents extended to motivating teachers to worker harder by distributing test scores and graduation rates to the public (p. 275). The "parent's right to know" provision of the law held a requirement to provide individual teacher's professional certification and

education data upon request, and notification when placing a child in a bilingual class. To encourage parent participation, schools should develop procedures to help them access meetings and staff, and resource centers for those parents whose children receive assistance through Title I (NCLB, 2001). If a school was not meeting adequate yearly progress minimums, parents had the option to move their child to a higher performing school.

Rogers (2006) took issue with the policy's narrative of parent power, arguing that the principles in the law are based on consumerist ideas that suggest the best way to keep a customer satisfied is to change what a business (in this case a school) is doing. Instead, Rogers proposed that systemic changes initiated by organized groups of parents represents true parental power, and that these would have more long-term effect in turning around underperforming schools (p. 625). The wide demographic diversity of most schools inhibits effective parent involvement, especially among those low on the socio-economic scale, but parent-initiated changes have been shown to be more effective in generating positive school reforms than those implemented by districts and individual schools (LaRocque, Kleiman, & Darling, 2011; Ma, Shen, & Krenn, 2014).

A central premise in the school improvement narrative has been to hold teachers to rigorous performance standards and for states to invest heavily in professional development and recruiting highly qualified individuals. NCLB provided basic guidelines of what constitutes a highly qualified teacher, including degrees and background (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The legislation also emphasized professional development, including areas such as reading instruction, screening and assessments to

determine proficiency levels and instruction strategies, addressing different learning styles, high risk or student populations with special needs, as well as working with the gifted and talented.

Teacher effectiveness would seem to be an outcome of teacher preparation programs, but studies examining the value of university credential programs offer conflicting data as to whether program quality predicts teacher effectiveness, if professional development offsets programmatic deficiencies, or, finally, whether teaching experience is the most reliable factor resulting in higher student achievement (Goldhaber & Liddle, 2012; Harris & Sass, 2011). Science teachers seem to benefit from targeted long-term professional development, which heightens their sense of self-efficacy and has a positive effect on student outcomes (Lumpe, Czerniak, Haney, & Beltyukova, 2012). Longitudinal studies examining teacher behaviors after attending professional development focused on content and innovative instructional strategies demonstrated modest gains in student achievement in math (Desimone, Smith, & Phillips, 2013). These data would support NCLB claims that while professional development is often helpful in raising student achievement, its effectiveness varies depending on the program and the subject (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001).

Although *A Nation at Risk* specifically addressed the need for improvement in math and science education, and led to a number of reforms, there were relatively few references to these subjects in NCLB. The primary narrative centered on developing partnerships with universities and private entities such as scientists and engineers for professional development and real-time skillset application, as a means to expand teacher

knowledge base. In addition, states were encouraged to entice high achieving math and science graduates to enter the teaching profession, to provide bonuses and incentives to work in low income areas, and to make available opportunities for partnerships to develop between universities, charter schools, and businesses to improve teacher training and ensure high quality programs (NCLB, 2001).

NCLB emphasized the widespread use of technology in instruction, assessment and school reform. Some of the mentioned uses included integrating technology into the classroom, using technology for distance and online learning, to promote inclusion, improve English mastery, and improve communication. The Enhancing Education Through Technology initiative (EETT), defunded in 2011, sought to provide technology access equity between high-poverty and low-poverty schools, a goal it had achieved by the time the 2009 final evaluation report was issued (U.S. Department of Education 2009a, p. 43). Other goals, such altering instructional practices and increasing the use of technology in the classroom through professional development, had not been reached. Additionally, student computer literacy levels were not measurable given the vast variances in assessment instruments and scoring methods used across the states, and inconsistent reporting from schools and districts nationwide.

Cheung and Slavin (2013) developed a meta-analysis of educational research to determine whether the use of technology in mathematics courses consistently resulted in higher student achievement, but found only modest improvements in test scores, findings supported by a 2014 survey of studies examining the effects of integrating a variety of technologies in different disciplines and grade levels. The survey showed that while

students enjoyed using the technology, these instructional tools could not account for all academic improvement (Savage & Brown, 2014, p. 26). Shapley, Sheehan, Maloney and Caranikas-Walker (2011) argued that while computers are undoubtedly useful in a class setting, to be effective in improving learning outcomes, they must be seen as just one aspect of "comprehensive school reform initiatives" (p. 312), and not considered the central feature that will bring about the sought-after improvements. Technology such as e-readers has some positive effect on reading fluency, although how much is not yet understood (Hess, 2014); research into the effectiveness of computer-based literacy acquisition programs is scarce, making it difficult to draw any definitive conclusions about the usefulness of reading software (Schneider et al., 2016). These difficulties were predicted by NCLB authors and have yet to be resolved; even so, the 2015 ESEA reauthorization (ESSA) has reintroduced funding for technology in schools, this time within a flexible block grant process (*Summary of ESSA*, n. d.).

Interwoven with the narrative of resolving the student achievement gap with an infusion of technology and internet access, was that of relying on scientifically based research (SBR) to determine what instructional approaches are evidence based and as such, more likely to raise student proficiency scores. No Child Left Behind offered a clear-cut definition of what constitutes legitimate scientifically based research methodologies, referencing strict empirical methodologies and peer reviews (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, p. 289). This description seems to address the problematic aspects of the term *research based*, and the possibility of unreliable results (Lyon, R., 1999, as cited in H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, p. 289). Kretlow and Blatz (2011) noted that federal

guidelines include the need for research to meet the criteria of generalizability, in order to ensure that results apply in different educational settings. Evidence-based practices in education depend on a foundation of scientifically based research, but must meet specific conditions, including the use of quantitative methods and improved outcomes based on clearly demonstrated cause and effect correlations. In addition, studies that have demonstrated sufficient magnitude are more likely to be used as examples of effectiveness in instructional practices and recommended to educational institutions (Kretlow & Blatz, 2011)

The What Works Clearinghouse of the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) funded by the Department of Education offers a database of reviewed SBR aligned instructional methodologies, as well as other topics including dropout prevention strategies, college preparedness and school governance (What Works Clearinghouse, n. d.). Since the site only offers materials vetted as *prioritized topics* (FAQs, What Works Clearinghouse, n. d.), it can be perceived as promoting a politically driven definition of what works in education; the narrative then becomes self-sustaining, promoting only the strategies and materials that support a preconceived outcome (Biesta, 2010; Bullock 2014). Biesta (2010) argued that over-reliance on evidence-based, reductionist educational practices could result in substandard outcomes, suggesting that asking what instructional strategies work may not be as important as determining the purpose of education, since definitive correlations between practice and outcome are difficult to verify and cannot establish a direction for education, only a means for achieving it.

It is worth noting that the What Works Clearinghouse claims that 70% of its reports "show positive or potentially positive effects on student outcomes" (FAQs), indicating the need for continued research, perhaps even developing broader definitions to include other methodologies. Henson, Hull, and Williams (2010), proposed that quantitative methodology training in doctoral programs is generally inadequate, which could potentially affect the quality of educational research overall. They concluded that this might be another indicator of the need to review the focus on evidence-based practices in educational policy.

English proficiency as a narrative in NCLB created a distinct correlation between language, student achievement and equity in education. Another outcome also embedded within this focus on English acquisition was homogenizing the student population. The NCLB authoring committee clearly delineated the objective of assimilating limited English proficient students into mainstream society, justifying its stance by rejecting the notion that the federal government's role in education includes retaining native languages (H.R. Doc. No. 107-63, 2001, pp. 326-32). This ideological discomfort with the use of more than one language as medium for access to education, or, as extension, to an *audible* political voice, is a global issue. Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2015) suggested that historically, especially after the cultural and linguistic homogenization efforts of post-revolutionary France, the tendency among nation-states has been more to reduce language diversity than to encourage it. The contention has been that this simplification would promote unity within a nation state and improve access to public services and functions. Inasmuch as schools are an important tool for political socialization (Powell

Jr., Dalton, & Strom, 2014), it is not surprising that curricula and standards frameworks encapsulate this concept. Liddicoat and Taylor-Leech (2015) also discussed the way this ideological framework devalues traditional languages or vernaculars, based on the concept that these languages are not as suited to learning contemporary and technological concepts.

The expressed ideal in NCLB of prioritizing English to enhance student achievement correlates with an international perception that English has become the international bridge language and mastery will improve a student's ability to enter college and participate in the job market (Hanna, 2011, Kaplan, 2014). This premise also suggests that any failure to emphasize learning English compromises an individual's ability to compete within the global economy, threatening not only personal, but also national economic interests (Hanna, 2011). These arguments justify the stance that since English is the dominant language of the American economy, its central positioning in education is inarguable. The government has positioned itself within the narrative as the guardian and promoter of this one-dimensional education, repudiating any responsibility to sanction other approaches. Bondy (2011) however, has countered these claims by arguing that imposing a monoglossic model actually normalizes and supports the existing hierarchy of political and social power by differentiating between those who fit within the prescribed norm and those who do not, and forcing non-conforming groups to adapt to the imposed standards. Citing Foucault's 1977/1995 definition of normalization as a "five step process consisting of comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization, and exclusion" (p. 392), Bondy suggested that promoting English as *the* language of

education is an implicit attempt to legitimize claims that only US born native English speakers are true Americans.

The narrative of dominant language as sole purveyor of authentic knowledge becomes clear when examining the issue of placing heritage language courses within curricula, or using them as a teaching medium in the classroom. Liddicoat & Curnow (2014) remarked on the way some programs use native languages as vehicles for teaching the nation's official language. This can marginalize the native tongue and nullify its role in sustaining cultural knowledge, while appearing to dismiss the significance of traditional values. To "keep the language" is indeed to "keep the thought" (Hermes, 2005 as cited in Deyhle & Comeau, 2011, p. 269), and to abolish it through a 21st century dismissal to irrelevancy--nested in concern for student economic success--has the ultimate consequence of delegitimizing the culture and heritage that originated it.

The text of NCLB expressed this projected outcome for Native American and Pacific Islander students in its statement that any program designed for these populations must have improved English proficiency as a primary outcome (20 USC 6916. Sec. 3216). This places Native American tribes in an existential vacuum of sorts, since legislation such as the Native American Languages Act of 1990 encouraged Native tribes to utilize their mother tongues for instruction, while other policies, including NCLB, openly advocate relegating these languages to secondary status, or projecting their use as a means for increasing English proficiency. The choice becomes how to present and teach Native languages as vital tools for maintaining traditional and cultural norms, while being expected to use them as instruments for teaching foreign concepts and ideals. The

delicate balancing act can result in losing the home language or a gradual decline in usage and proficiency, as seen in the Navajo Nation, where the desire to sustain the language is strong, but fluency levels are dropping (Todacheeny, 2014). Further complicating matters, legislation such as Arizona's Proposition 203, which requires teaching all public school courses in English, does not apply to tribally controlled schools within the state, thus separating the manner in which Navajo children are instructed by their locality and access to different schools (Napolitano, 2001).

The social justice aspirations of NCLB manifested in narratives were centered on poverty, Indigenous education, gender equity, and students with specific needs such as the disabled, immigrant children, and the incarcerated; as Senator Kennedy (2005) commented, NCLB promised that all children would be provided the same opportunities, and that accountability frameworks would ensure these outcomes. Improved school programs would integrate outlier children—those who do not fit within the student norm. In addition, family centered activities were encouraged, to promote early literacy and parental involvement in student success, as well as provide adult learners with access to online or video courses to assist them in acquiring job skills. NCLB addressed gender equity issues by asking states to create programs to assist girls in their transition to a working environment and encourage them to develop STEM skills, so they can qualify for high paying jobs requiring advanced expertise. The act also promoted school re-entry programs for girls encountering difficulties due to disabilities, pregnancy, motherhood, LEP, or other obstacles. These efforts, while aligned with aspects of the government's narrative to provide parity in education, were not particularly successful, as noted by

Gamoran (2013), who commented that the United States continues to confront educational inequality aligned with geographical location and SES, and that this ongoing problem will continue to hamper the American ideal of social mobility.

The Department of Education's 2013 report, *For Each and Every Child,* articulated one aspect of the educational equity narrative, namely that unity can only be achieved with federal leadership to be accomplished by

- Providing a federal loan program for states to assist with "funding streams" for programs targeting low income students (p. 35)
- Developing incentives to encourage districts to adopt legal means for increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity in schools
- Funding and developing national research strategies designed to improve teaching, curriculum development and assessment strategies. (The Equity and Excellence Commission, 2013).

The 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act shifted some of this weight from federal to state and local governments, introducing measures that ask states to develop assessment and accountability measures more aligned with local needs and circumstances, and developing a pilot program around the concept of *weighted school funding*--allocating extra money for students in need of extra support, which encourages districts to demonstrate that the way they allocate tax dollars is equitable ("ESSA Progress Report," 2015, p. 10). These efforts to redirect funding are new approaches to the persistent problem of inequity in education that American communities confront. While NCLB was the apex of a movement toward uniformity and utilitarianism in education, subsequent

initiatives such as Race to the Top inserted competition into the discourse, based on the premise that rewarding states and districts for novel school improvement plans would incentivize creativity and generate solutions to persistent problems.

Race to the Top.

President Obama's 2009 Race to the Top (RTT) initiative, included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was a competitive grant program that divided limited funds between the winning states (U.S. Department of Education, 2009b). This policy revealed a subtle shift in the narrative of federal government as presumptive authority in setting agendas, methods, and appropriate outcomes of educational endeavors. Instead, the premise appeared to have become one of leadership engaged in empowering followers. One question this raises is whether the new freedom given states to "innovate" constituted real or false empowerment---did the federal government ever intend to relinquish its authority to determine the direction education should take, or was it simply a switch from cane to carrot, to entice states to pursue a predetermined course. A closer examination of the parameters of RTT indicate the latter—the initiative was a tacit recognition of the difficulty of accomplishing federal goals through the avenues developed by the authors of NCLB, and an attempt to circumvent obstacles though the use of inducements, whether these be financial rewards or appeals to a spirit of unity and collaboration. The Obama administration used the language of competition, reward, empowerment, choice, and collaboration as means toward achieving the objectives of NCLB that had failed to materialize.

The question of empowerment is especially cogent in the field of education; in the United States, there has been an ongoing confrontation between government entities, communities, and social groups to resolve who has the ultimate authority to decide what children are supposed to learn, the purpose of this endeavor, and how to implement it. Ciulla (2010) explained that *true empowerment* involves sincere resolution and authentic intent on the part of leadership to create a level of horizontality previously nonexistent, as well the willingness to renounce some control in order to encourage the creativity and spontaneity that genuine empowerment galvanizes. "Bogus empowerment," on the other hand, offers no more than a pretense of autonomy while keeping intact the hierarchal structure—and often results in frustration and a deep sense of betrayal (p. 207). Thus, true empowerment implies a level of trust between those who are relinquishing authority and those granted such, a faith based on valuing different perspectives. Anything other than this introduces a dichotomy into situations where an idea is only valid if it agrees with the frameworks of those in power. Indigenous peoples confront this duality on a continuous basis, as they pursue a sovereignty acknowledged by treaty, yet circumscribed by a federal government that repeatedly manifests reluctance to empower, most notably in the area of education.

It appears that in RTT there was no real intent of releasing the reins of authority or embracing change, unless its results aligned closely with pre-established criteria and desired outcomes. Obama's assertion that grant winners would have to meet "a few key benchmarks for reform," meaning benchmarks established in 2010 by the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, was a clear

indicator of these constraints (Viteritti, 2013, p. 2102). On the other hand, there was an emphasis on collaboration and states were encouraged to participate in creating avenues to accomplishing federal objectives. One goal was to introduce a common set of standards; RTT's competitive scoring rubric allowed extra points for states agreeing to promote these (Viteritti, 2013).

This approach might seem a logical choice, given NCLB's failures. McGuinn (2012) suggested that the lack of any real federal authority in education led to cosmetic changes designed to meet federal guidelines and maintain needed funding, but not necessarily to actual school improvements (p. 153). Attempted compliance with NCLB mandates adopted many forms; some, such as teaching to the test, shifting measures of proficiency, and watering-down standards (Berliner, 2011; Koyama, 2011; Shirvani, 2009) reflected efforts to counter factors that typically affected outcomes, such as SES. RTT changed the tenor of the narrative from reprimand to encouragement, from punishment to reward, in the hope of stopping these practices and stemming the downward trend of lackluster test scores and low graduation rates. Even with these positive influences, serious obstacles to winning grant money still exist, notably the vastly different capacity of states to implement the level of change required to conform to RTT requirements, which Manna and Ryan (2011) suggested could interfere with its long term success.

In order to identify the conceptual domains that undergird this initiative, and determine whether recent federal educational narratives have reiterated Cold War perspectives, I repeated the strategy of provisional and then pattern coding used for the

NCLB analysis. While there were 19 areas of emphasis within the report, those with more than 10 references appeared to be principal concepts (Table 4).

Table 4

Primary conceptual domains RTT

Conceptual domain	References
Assessments	12
Collaboration and transparency	35
Effective teachers	31
Innovation	11
School improvement	11
Technology and data	26

The results showed that RTT emphases closely aligned with those of NCLB, except in one specific area, that of *collaboration and transparency.* This new conceptual domain reflected the previously mentioned shift in narrative from federal government as principal actor in determining appropriate strategies and outcomes, to granting a degree of agency to other players. Under RTT, federal funding that traditionally required states to budget for projected needs, and allocated monies based on predetermined formulas, now challenged states to develop effective reform strategies while adhering closely to federal objectives (McGuinn, 2014). In addition, although areas such as *assessments* and *technology* reflected NCLB priorities, the contexts for these ideas reflected a recognition of new ways to use them, including the use of accrued student data in longitudinal studies to glean accurate information on the effect of implemented changes (DOE, 2015).

The pattern codes for RTT (Table 5) list the sub categories within these domains that demonstrate new directions for school reform, many sourced in information sharing, collaboration, and incremental evaluative systems—whether for teacher effectiveness or

student achievement. The two domains titled *innovation* and *school improvement* did not contain underlying subcategories and so were not included in the pattern coding matrix, although they too contain important narratives that contribute to the overall feeling of transformation.

Table 5

Pattern Coding for Race to the Top Conceptual Domains

Conceptual domains	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary
Assessments	Refining assessment practices	Formative assessments		
Collaboration and transparency	Collaboration between SEAs and LEAs	Intra-district collaboration	Transparency for enhanced collaboration	Collaboration with DoE
Effective teachers	New approaches to teacher evaluation	Enhanced professional training	Supporting teachers in the classroom	
Technology and data use	Information dissemination	Enhancing instruction		

Any analysis of Race to the Top must be contextualized within the framework of Common Core, a new approach to establishing standards designed to insert a level of uniformity within state curricula. Manna and Ryan (2011) described the introduction of universal common standards as a means to counter the unanticipated consequences of NCLB's strict accountability measures. While a state's decision to adopt Common Core standards was voluntary, proposed plans integrating Common Core English and Math

components earned additional points in the hope that observing other states' success could inspire non-winning states, and their approaches serve as templates (Manna & Ryan, 2011; Viteritti, 2013).

Another important concept of Common Core was equity, a theme originating in *A Nation at Risk.* While NCLB sought to promote this through funding allocations under Title I and strict accountability measures, RTT encouraged states to adopt uniform standards to prepare students equally for college and career. Kornhaber, Griffith, and Tyler (2013) suggested that the assumptions propelling Common Core included equal opportunity in accessing high quality, challenging resources, and a common set of standards that would create comparable expectations of all students. RTT also proposed a push toward aligning assessments with Common Core, in order to introduce "symmetry between what students are taught and what they are tested on," which was not necessarily the case with NCLB (Viteritti, 2013, p. 2104). These ideas constituted some of the more innovative aspects of the initiative.

The conceptual domains of RTT are closely interconnected, since they reflect different aspects of a singular ideal, which was to quickly modernize a moribund educational system and, using market-based strategies based on competition, jump-start reforms that would improve student achievement and graduation rates. The collaborative aspects of RTT centered mostly on communication—between state and local educational agencies, within districts, and among teachers and administrative staff. Transparency replaced opaqueness, territorialism yielded to collective action and cooperation based on a shared objective of student achievement. These shifts reflect an evolutionary aspect of

policy that Roe (1994) described when he noted that the persistence of an ineffectual narrative could be useful for creating a counter-narrative, even if it is only a modification for improvement. This subtle transference is an effective strategic move for those seeking to maintain the status quo while adapting to new circumstances (Roe, 1994). In this case, the argument of top-down, narrowly defined and accountability-based reforms as the best approach for increasing student achievement seemed to change, but the underlying premises remained intact.

Teacher effectiveness was central to most RTT reforms, as their role in fostering learning was increasingly scrutinized and evaluated. Performance based evaluation was framed positively, referencing the need to create guidelines that would help individuals understand expected performance levels and the criteria for achieving these (Department of Education, 2015, p. xiv; *Scoring rubric*, 2010). There was an increased focus on individualizing teacher evaluation based on observation and use of various assessment tools to measure incremental growth in student achievement. New opportunities for discourse between evaluators and the assessed arose, designed to improve the instruments used for measuring performance and empower stakeholders (Aguilar & Richerme, 2014; DoE, 2015). These changes contrasted sharply with NCLB, as the emphasis moved from describing ideal teacher qualifications, to encouraging teacher and principal agency in developing a system that would improve quality.

Assessments under RTT acquired new importance, as their use progressed from being primarily a mechanism for change through accountability, to one for measuring individual learning and provide accurate feedback for teachers and schools. Bennett

(2010), describing research being conducted on new assessment methodologies, conceptualized a system that would be cognitively based and provide data *of , for,* and *as Learning* (CBAL, p. 72), in essence an approach to evaluation that would reflect new perspectives on the purpose and usefulness of measuring student achievement. RTT also encouraged the use of formative assessments, frequent small evaluations in the classroom to determine comprehension and retention and promote student self-assessment (Heritage, 2010). Increasing the use of formative assessments would imply changes to teacher pre-service training and professional development, and a shift toward dialectic approaches rather than didactic (Heritage, 2010). Summative assessment instruments are gradually being aligned with Common Core standards, although this has not been a smooth transition (Jochim & McGuinn, 2016; Pilotin, 2010).

Race to the Top reflects a re-make of NCLB's principles, couched in language designed to inspire states and local communities to engage in transforming their schools. Confronted with the multiple failures of NCLB, the Obama administration at first issued waivers to certain requirements imposed by the legislation, then introduced palliatives including RTT as executive level initiatives (McGuinn, 2016b). This analysis revealed a continuation of the implicit stories told in *A Nation at Risk* and NCLB of the struggle to retain economic and military pre-eminence, raising student achievement by redesigning the educational system, and reemphasizing the narrative of education as pathway to career and financial success.

While RTT on the surface created the appearance of introducing a level of egalitarianism, in reality it retained the historical hierarchic aspects of federalism,

granting states only partial autonomy. The Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 shifted some authority back to the states, perhaps as a reaction to what might be considered executive overreach by the Obama administration (McGuinn, 2016b), but did not change the fundamental narratives woven within American education policy. The next section of this chapter presents the Navajo perspective, which, while recognizing the need for a good education and the utility of acquiring skillsets that reflect contemporary economic environments, focuses on a holistic approach that provides avenues for students to engage successfully with their culture as well as modern American society.

The Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005

The brief historical overlook of Navajo sovereignty provided in the literature review gives background for understanding that sovereignty can be a nuanced term for the Navajo, just as it is for other American Indigenous peoples. Deloria Jr. (1998), reflecting on Indian intellectual self-determination and on the contextual nature of sovereignty, commented, “The definition of sovereignty covers a multitude of sins, having lost its political moorings, and is now adrift on the currents of individual fancy” (p 27). While sovereignty is an important concept for the survival of Native populations and their heritage, Albert Hale (1998), former president of the Navajo Nation, suggested that the term tribal sovereignty is really an attempt by the federal government to limit the purview of tribal legitimacy to listed tribal members, and as such becomes a contradiction (p. 9). To Hale, the concept of sovereignty for the Navajo is constrained by the relationships it must have with state and federal governments, and eroded by constant efforts to restrict self-determination.

While cooperating with outside intervention on a temporary basis, the Diné people have resisted efforts to force their society into a Westernized mold, and continue to seek a balanced system that can interact effectively with state and federal governments while retaining the authenticity of their culture and perspectives. This resolve by the Navajo to maintain cultural integrity while negotiating with federal authority has been a persistent feature of their historical narrative, just as it has been for most Indigenous peoples in the United States (Simons, 2013). The use of the word *sovereignty* in the title of the Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act (NNSEA) establishes that the Navajo Council has taken a stance toward creating their own definition of self-governance. Subsection D of Section 1of the Act clarifies this position:

> The Navajo Nation specifically claims for its people and holds the government of the United States responsible for the education of the Navajo People, based upon the Treaty of 1868 and the trust responsibility of the federal government toward Indian tribes. The Navajo People also claim their rights as citizens of the states within which they reside to a non-discriminatory public education. In exercising its responsibility and authority for the education of the Navajo people, the Navajo Nation does not sanction or bring about any abrogation of the rights of the Navajo Nation or the Navajo People based upon treaty, trust or citizenship, nor does it diminish the obligation of the federal government or of any state or local political subdivision of a state. (Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act, 2005)

These assertions shift the hierarchy of the relationship between the Navajo Council and federal governments, to one where the Council establishes a claim based on

treaty, interprets the wording of the treaty, and clarifies that their authority and control of certain aspects of the contractual relationship does not abrogate the obligations of these governing bodies toward the Navajo tribe. My analysis of the narratives within the act stemmed from acknowledging this stance and seeking to understand how it might influence priorities, just as the report *A Nation at Risk* laid the foundation for NCLB.

The NNSEA documents the creation of the Navajo Nation Board of Education (NNBOE) whose purview is to oversee all schools operating within the Nation, whether under the BIE, the various states, or private entities. This oversight can be direct, by intergovernmental accord, or memoranda of agreement. In addition, the Act creates the Department of Diné Education (DODE), whose role is to implement and enforce the laws of the Navajo Nation as they apply to education, as well as that of the Superintendent of Schools. Furthermore, agency (BIE) and community school board formation and responsibilities are outlined, along with the powers and duties of the Diné Bi Olta School Board Association. The Act establishes the Navajo Nation Teacher Education Consortium whose role is to assist Navajos become teachers, provide funding for professional development, and ensure the inclusion of Navajo culture and language within curricula. Finally, the NNSEA outlines the establishment of a non-profit educational scholarship foundation.

The strategy for coding the NNSEA followed the same principles used for NCLB and RTT. I did not code the sections that simply outlined the duties and responsibilities of officers, those that outlined funding allocations, or other general organizational sections. Table 6 lists the primary conceptual domains found within the text, whether stated

explicitly or by inference. While domains with fewer than six references were not included in this table, omissions do not imply an absence of relevance to the narratives; they are instead included contextually within the analysis.

Table 6

Primary conceptual domains of NNSEA

Conceptual Domains	References
Accountability	6
Children's needs	19
Culture	17
Curriculum	10
Learning Environments	7
Navajo Language	13
Navajo Nation Sovereignty	26
Parents, families, and Communities	16
Teachers	6

Pattern coding uncovered a number of subtexts within each domain, each of which holds an ordinate placement based on the emphasis given within the text, whether this be by repetition or elaboration (Table 7) .

Table 7

Pattern Coding within primary conceptual domains of NNSEA

Conceptual domain	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary	Quinary
Education	Safety and quality environments conducive to learning	Excellent academic programs including rich cultural experiences	Community involvement in child's education	Healthy, strong, invested family	Attention to the developmental needs of different student groups including disabled and gifted.
Culture	Cultural and linguistic knowledge as a qualification for job or position	Culture as required coursework for Navajo students	Critical importance of culture and language to preserve Diné distinctiveness		
Curriculum	Includes strong Navajo language and culture components	Addresses Navajo student needs as a distinct group	Character development	Career, practical skills, subject matter	
Learning Environments	Safe and appropriate facilities and environments	Focus on optimal child development	Navajo Nation and community authority over schools		
Navajo Language	Navajo language studies are a priority	Navajo language as critical to survival of Diné culture	Immersion and use of Navajo as instructional medium.		
Navajo Law	Establishing its authority over different educational aspects	Consultative and collaborative aspects encouraged within the Act	Enforcement advocated but not detailed		

(table continues)

Conceptual domain	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Quaternary	Quinary
Parents, families, and communities	As active participants in the decision making process	Responsible for children's wellbeing and education			
Teachers	Locating, training, employing teachers with appropriate skills for working with Dine' students				

The initial aspect examined was the preeminent conceptual domain within the Act, that of Navajo law and sovereignty (*f* =26). There were numerous references to establishing agencies, roles, and programs in accordance with Navajo law, a continuation of the Navajo Council's affirmation of the right to control the way Navajo students are taught. One administrator at the Department of Diné Education expressed the dichotomy of working in a system that has laws granting more self-determination to Indigenous peoples but ties funding to federal mandates. The Navajo would prefer to receive the funding and determine their own educational path, but every allocated dollar has strings attached, such as implementing Common Core standards.

One of the ways in which the tribe has made considerable progress in establishing control has been an alternative accountability system to be used in all Navajo PL 100-297 and PL 93-638 schools as well as a charter school situated in New Mexico (*Diné School AP*, 2016; *Resolution NNBOE*, 2014). This document received federal approval in

September 2016 after several years of review (S. Jewell, & J. King, Jr., personal communication to the Navajo Council, September 20, 2016), and creates a means for the Nation to measure student achievement based on student growth instead of standardized tests. One respondent, commenting on the need to move away from trying to quantify learning and the effect of standardized tests of Navajo students, pointed out that, while standardized testing does reveal how students compare to the average, it also functions as a means for institutions to stratify students by performance, creating a classification that can discourage low performing individuals. In addition, standardized tests are based on prior knowledge considered commonplace to those outside the reservation, but is in many ways foreign to children who do not interact with the outside on a continuous basis. The new accountability system developed by DODE addresses these issues and incorporates the NNSEA's mandate to integrate Navajo language and culture into the curriculum and provide an appropriate set of instruments for measuring achievement (*Diné School AP*, 2016).

Another aspect of the NNSEA reinforcing the domain of sovereignty was implementation; while the exact manner in which such items as school attendance would be enforced were not explicitly delineated, the framework for enactment was established. An important concept within this sphere was the emphasis on collaboration and consultation, with attention to the potential effects on local communities and individuals. Agencies were required to consult with communities and seek their approval for any proposal or change, and to refrain from implementing them until such authorization occurred (Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act, 2005, p. 25). This collaborative

aspect implicitly expresses the important cultural aspects of *hózhó* (”harmonious balance) and “*k’é* (“compassionate interdependent kinship relations”) both integral Diné perspectives, and can be seen to represent a means of weaving sovereignty within the fabric of policy (Emerson, 2014, p. 56). In 2002, the Navajo Council passed a resolution amending Title I of the Navajo Nation Code to incorporate the *Fundamental laws of the Diné* into their procedures, certifying the cultural foundation of their laws. Throughout this chapter, I show how the Navajo incorporated these ideas into every aspect of education.

The next most emphasized narrative within the act was children’s needs (*f* =19*)*, a broad term encompassing a number of concepts. The primary ideal was to provide a safe, quality environment for optimal learning, and ongoing monitoring to ensure schools upheld fundamental standards. The NNBOE and DODE were charged with researching and implementing strategies that address the needs of Navajo students, including examining every aspect of the educational environment Navajo children are exposed to, as well as the curricula, assessment procedures and expectations being placed on them (Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act 2005, p. 11). Counseling services are to be sensitive to the cultural, social, and economic needs of students and their families, and other services, such as transportation, should support student academic success. In addition, the Act required that schools serving the Navajo Nation provide curricula tailored to the needs, cultural values and interests of Navajo children. This differs from federal and state mandates, which encourage uniform standards such as Common Core. Finally, the act discouraged transfers between schools, arguing that this interferes unduly

with academic consistency and achievement.

Reflecting on what constitutes an ideal education for Navajo students, the DODE administrators interviewed reflected on the importance of providing students a holistic education that addresses modernity as well as traditional skills and values. One official noted that education should include,

> Preparation for life, life skills, so that you have all the tools to make good decisions. Probably the ability to weigh your options, which would include a lot of critical thinking, but mainly life preparation. I know that in Western education it's pretty much to graduate from high school and go to college and have a good job-- which might be also, if they really looked at it, might be life skills, but coming from a Navajo perspective, getting a high school diploma and a college degree is only part of a longer period of living and may only be the beginning, so what we're aiming really is at life skills, at preparing for living a successful life….

Another administrator offered a philosophical perspective by noting that education should help students answer questions about the purpose of life, including determining whether one's existence makes a difference to self and others, and how to express these concepts in daily living, as an individual and a Navajo.

There was consensus among the administrators that a critical component of any education presented to Navajo youth should provide them with appropriate skills and social abilities so that they can survive in either the Western world or the Navajo Nation. Responding to a question about the best strategies for educating children, one

administrator suggested offering a balanced set of skills, so that they can function successfully on and off the reservation. Lamenting the fact that some Navajo parents only their teach their children Western Anglo values, one administrator noted that these youth might not be able to return to the Navajo reservation and survive since,

> They don't know the language, they don't know the social skills, they don't know the cultural skills, they don't understand the language, and why people are doing things, and so they're kind of isolated within-- even though they're on the reservation, they're isolated….

Other important needs described by the NNSEA included community involvement in education and healthy, invested families. Consulting parents and communities on major decisions affecting the school and their children's education, was a feature closely resembling NCLB's emphasis on parental involvement. The NNSEA's section on Head Start spoke eloquently to engaging the family in the process of educating the child and of the need to ensure that families survive and flourish (p. 4). An oblique means for accomplishing the goal of healthy families resided in the section that mandated continuing education for adults, including individuals with disabilities, thus encoding the correlation between community and family economic well-being with that of the Navajo Nation (p. 38).

Asked about her experiences in public school, the sole young female respondent, whom I shall call Marina for the purposes of confidentiality and anonymity, expressed that she enjoyed school and liked her teachers, whether at the elementary, middle or high school level, and generally felt that the environment was safe and conducive to learning.

Unfortunately, her family situation was extremely difficult and she was moved around from one school to another, as her parents were unable to remain in any one house for a prolonged period. Marina described this dichotomy of enjoying school and struggling at home:

> School was fun. It kept me busy. It helped me get things off my mind. When I was at home, it was very hard for me to excel. The family that I grew up in, the kind of environment I was in, it felt like I wasn't safe at home. My mom and dad were alcoholics. It was very hard for me to deal with every day. My mom would make me babysit all the time, and would keep me from school. It was very hard for me to go.

As the second child and the oldest daughter, Marina had to balance her academics with her responsibilities at home. Commenting on some of her duties, Marina noted:

> My brothers used to come home all the time and I used to help them out with homework, and then they'd go outside and play, and then I'd have time to do my homework. We always did our homework on time when we came home, but at that time my mom and dad would just leave. We'd be the only ones home by ourselves… When my sister was born … she was born and I took care of her, and raised my sister.

The primary research question asks what contributes to the decision some Navajo girls make to drop out of high school. Some of the experiences Marina described highlight mechanisms that *pull* students away from education, including excessive school mobility. Gasper, Deluca, and Estacion (2012) found a strong correlation between

switching schools for reasons other than grade promotion and dropping out; while the act of transferring between schools is not considered the causative factor, it is seen as contributing to a sense of disengagement that can magnify the effects of other risk factors including poverty, a non-intact family situation, and low academic achievement. Marina not only changed schools numerous times, but at one point was pulled out of her home along with her siblings by the state's Children's Services and placed in a group home, which may have contributed to her sense of disorientation and disconnection.

It is likely that the stress caused by the parent's alcoholism contributed to Marina's eventual decision to leave school permanently, although she did not attribute this as the primary factor, as seen in a later section of this analysis. Marina often took over the parenting role when she returned from school, and assisted in providing for her infant sister's needs, two activities that can interfere in an adolescent's ability to sustain academic performance. While a clear correlation between alcoholism in parents and dropping out of high school is difficult to establish, research has found an association between the presence of an alcoholic father and an increased likelihood of economic problems for their families, as well as a higher probability of dropout among their offspring --although more so for boys than for girls (Pinto & Kulkami, 2012). Maternal problem drinking has been associated with attention and conduct disorders among children, leading to a higher risk of academic difficulty (Torvik, Rognmo, Ask, Roysamb, & Tambs, 2011). As difficult as this home environment was for Marina, she acknowledged that her parents were also engaged in her schooling, by noting that her father often drove her to school and that her family encouraged her to go to school in

order to create a better life for herself then they were able to provide.

The close association between the conceptual domains of Navajo language (*f* =13) and culture (*f* =17) led to combining the discussion on these two topics into a single section. The NNSEA emphasized the critical correlation between the preservation of the Navajo culture and fluency in spoken Navajo, and the very survival of the Navajo Nation as a distinct entity (p. 5). This supports Skuttnabb-Kongas' (2001) contention, offered in the literature review, that heritage languages are repositories of unique cultural and environmental knowledge, and as such represent the foundation of distinctive cultures; losing the language can mean destroying the fibers that hold a culture together. The NNSEA required that educational agencies under the mandate of the Navajo Nation include instruction in Navajo language and culture as part of the curriculum.

Although these appeared relatively straightforward as concepts, the use of Navajo is a complex issue with sociological implications confronting the Diné people on multiple levels. Many Diné have stopped speaking Navajo in their daily interactions for several reasons, including that some feel English represents modernity and contemporary thinking, while Navajo does not. One administrator expressed this idea by explaining that, according to a linguist who studied the situation in 1992,

> There's a hierarchy…a social, political, and economic hierarchy that's developing on the Navajo Nation, and according to that developing hierarchy the more English you speak the more political power that you're going to have…. the more economic power you're going to have, and the more social power you're going to have…and as time goes by, the number of English only speakers is going to

> increase, and they're going to have all the power and the monolingual Navajo speakers are going to become more marginalized and it's going to come out that the more Navajo you speak, the less power you're going to have and the farther down on the bottom you're going to be of that hierarchy.

In addition to the concept of language as a means of establishing power, some perceive a social stigma attached to the use of Navajo, which might lead them to avoid the use of their heritage language. As this respondent noted, whether or not an individual utilizes Navajo as their primary language sometimes distinguishes social strata. This interviewee also cited a study showing that the number of fluent Navajo speakers had dropped from a high of 93% in 1980 to around 77% in 2000, and plummeted by 25% to a low of circa 50% in 2010. The projection, according to this participant, is that by 2030 there will only be a few fluent speakers left.

There is, however, a movement to reconnect with the language. Lee (2014) advocated that the Diné acquire "critical language consciousness," (p. 160), which includes a keen awareness of the central role language plays in sustaining culture and a dedicated effort to revitalize the language to ensure its survival, by confronting the factors that marginalize it, whether external or internal. Lee noted that large numbers of Diné youth are, in her experience as a university professor in New Mexico, reclaiming their heritage and dedicated to learning the language—which they wish they had learned at home, instead of in school. One of the administrative respondents in this study also remarked on the experience of listening to her college students expressing regret at not having learned the language in their home; this is reminiscent of Lockard's (1995)

remarks that she did not understand the importance of preserving her native tongue until she had graduated from college, and realized that language provided an important pathway to reclaiming her cultural roots (p. 9).

Marina, the young woman whose narrative I collected as part of this study, explained that her family spoke mostly English in the home, except that she conversed only in Navajo with her grandmother, and that thanks to this exposure, considered herself relatively fluent. Her mother was a very traditional Diné who also could speak Navajo, whereas her father preferred that the family use English. Marina felt that it was important to keep the Navajo language intact and teach it to all Navajo children; although she was not able to concisely express why that would be essential, she did note that her own young son was learning Navajo as his first language, in large part because he was able to spend time with his grandparents. Marina also remarked that most of her friends communicated in English only, and that she was not sure how many spoke Navajo, nor how fluent they might be.

These examples appear to be contemporary manifestations of the malaise confronting the Navajo Nation as it attempts to reestablish the centrality of its heritage language and promote its correlation to cultural preservation. Funding has been an obstacle for achieving NNSEA goals, as well as a dearth of suitably trained teachers. Immersion programs such as those located in Ft Defiance and Round Rock have proven very successful and popular, with students demonstrating high academic achievement in addition to fluency in their mother tongue and familiarity with their culture and traditions (Benally & Viris, 2005). As one administrator commented:

> You can tell who went to Rock Point, those people are highly successful. They're bilingual, bi-literate, bi- cultural, they understand Navajo culture so much more thoroughly than other people who didn't go to those schools and… you know, the success of the students that went there is very evident-- you can always tell who went to Rock Point because they're outspoken, they're very confident in themselves, they understand so much, they have really good manners and they're just…you can just tell who they are versus other people.

The emphasis on preserving the heritage language of the Diné was bolstered by the importance given to teaching Diné culture and the foundations of Diné government. The NNSEA required that curricula include courses that develop student knowledge of Navajo government, culture, and societal structure, and that these be created in consultation with local communities, parents, students, and school boards (p. 14). This form of *indigenization* deliberately infuses the fundamental precepts of Diné culture into the domain of education established by Western customs, and declares it as the guiding force for developing a curriculum that best serves the purpose of the Navajo Nation's claim to sovereignty in education. Emerson (2014) defined indigenization as a process that includes relating modern Western norms to traditional indigenous values, arguing that indigenization is a means for the Diné to reconnect with the beauty and harmony of their culture. Denetdale (2014) suggested that "Enacting cultural sovereignty requires attention to an internal cultural and community based model whereby tradition and history are crucial to affirming Native American epistemologies and provide the material upon which to rebuild tribally centered nations and communities" (p. 71). Cultural

sovereignty in this context is the right to prioritize Indigenous standards and values. These ideals are found within the Culture Standard disseminated by the DODE, whose premise is that students will be familiar with and appreciate the Diné way of life followed by age and grade-level appropriate concepts with varying strategies for demonstrating proficiency (Department of Diné Education n. d.). One administrator at DODE explained that the effort to create a complete curriculum is ongoing and that they anticipate its publication at the end of 2016 or early 2017.

The efforts to ensure Diné language and culture content in education can be seen as one aspect of a multilayered response to the gradual diffusion of cultural integrity confronted by Indigenous groups globally, a dissolution aggravated by the permeation of Western technology and easy access to ideologies that advocate consumerism, individualism, and capitalist economic models. Those within the Navajo Nation seeking to restore the centrality of core Diné values discussed the dichotomies confronting the Nation as it attempts to balance modernity with tradition. One administrator at DODE mentioned his father's feelings of being part of a shrinking minority:" My dad always says that, 'I wonder how many of us are still left that are real Navajo thinkers,' you know. Even himself, he admits that he's not a one hundred Navajo thinker no more, because of some of the requirements, he's not practicing nor living it no more…." Another, commenting on the loss of culture due to interference with oral storytelling, an important component of cultural transmission (Denetdale, 2014, p. 69), explained that

> Now we have even third, fourth, fifth generation people who haven't learned the language, or who haven't been taught or studied their culture, you know, nobody

> has told them stories. When we went to boarding school, we didn't hear those stories because a lot of those stories were winter stories, and we were in school in the winter, and so that generation of parents did not relearn those stories and most of them could not retell those stories; at the same time, they still have grandparents that could retell those stories, but because of jobs and going away to school, they were not able to hear stories from the grandparents… and so that's one of the costs of having gotten a Western education.

This divide between Western and Diné cultural emphases affects every level of life and the direction the tribe takes as it seeks to navigate an ever increasingly difficult political, economic, and social situation. One administrator encapsulated the conflict by explaining that when Navajo youth leave the Nation to obtain higher education, they sometimes return with different perspectives that clash with those of the elders, creating conflict over whose approach is best, a dichotomy described as the *assimilated mind* versus the Navajo. Traditional approaches to utilizing the resources offered by the land—agriculture, ranching—clash with resource extraction that provides a quick monetary return but damages the environment while pulling the people away from a simpler, perhaps healthier lifestyle.

Bringing community into the schooling environment, a method used by some American Indian tribal schools, is a way of infusing culture into children's daily experiences. A proposal one DODE administrator suggested for introducing this aspect into elementary schools would be to bring elders to teach classes such as traditional weaving and cooking, and to make English instruction a secondary class so that Navajo

students could concentrate on learning their own language and traditions in the early years, along with core subjects such as math and science. This proposal would differentiate between K-8 and high school, and would ensure that students had the requisite familiarity with their own language and traditions as a foundation before moving into more discipline-centered studies.

Describing her own conflicted cultural situation at home, Marina explained that her father, a Christian, did not want his children to participate in traditional ceremonies, whereas her mother encouraged them. This division led to circumstances such as her own exposure being limited to attending an occasional sweat, and of her younger sister being the only one to attend a Kinaaldá, the ceremony for transitioning to womanhood. Marina noted that she did not understand the significance of sweats at the time but enjoyed them because they were traditional activities, which supports one administrator's observation that young Diné often do not know the meaning of the prayers or ceremonies they attend, and need the prayers translated for them as they perform the traditional rituals. Questioned about her reaction to the concept of having elders and community members contribute in school by teaching courses, Marina supported the idea, stating, "It would be great to have the elders come into the schools and teach traditional skills. This would help kids understand their traditions better."

The literature review presented numerous findings of the correlation between a well-developed ethnic identity and sense of self-sufficiency and confident self-positioning within a society, both of which contribute to student achievement. The focus of the Navajo Nation's educational agenda seeks to develop this within Diné youth by

creating a space at an early age where children immerse in the language and traditions of their people; this would serve as a foundation to preserve this cultural identity as they venture into a more Westernized environment. Marina's experiences reveal the plight of many of her contemporaries: while appreciating the traditions and ceremonies of her culture, she does not necessarily understand them; she is comforted by and enjoys attending the ceremonies, but has only experienced them in a fragmentary manner. These aspects have placed her in the position of having to choose between two dichotomous positions, or attempt to integrate both and prioritize each situationally, a difficult and stressful course to navigate.

There was a considerable emphasis placed upon curriculum within the NNSEA; aside from core subjects and the Navajo language and cultural components, the legislation also encouraged integrating career education "into all subject areas" so students become aware of the correlation between what they are learning and its usefulness in their life work (p. 2). The NNSEA's introductory stance was that all institutions utilize a curriculum that addresses the cultural social, and intellectual needs of the students, is aligned with the standards adopted by the Navajo Nation, and meets federal adequate yearly progress guidelines. This allows for considerable innovation by tribally controlled schools; inasmuch as the Nation is in the process of creating its own official curriculum and standards for designated schools, it is probable that implementing this directive will become more practicable with time.

When asked about the ideal curriculum for Navajo students, and whether technology should be integrated to the extent it is in public schools, the DODE officials

participating in the study emphasized the aforementioned cultural aspects, and discussed the roles of technology and career training in school. While encouraging use of technology for furthering access to knowledge and broadening the educational experience of Navajo students, the respondents felt that inadequate teacher training, along with overly restrictive school policies, were creating unnecessary obstacles to mastering the use of available technology. Discussing the fact that most students had internet access through their cell phones, one administrator argued for utilizing these in the classroom as opposed to confiscating them or keeping them turned off. This might require that teachers and students reformulate their definitions of the purpose of technology. Another respondent explained that there is not necessarily a conflict between traditional Navajo culture and modern technology, inasmuch as the Navajo are adaptive and have already incorporated numerous innovations into their everyday definition of culture, including rodeos, sports, automobiles and technological innovations.

While the integration of technology into the curriculum was seen as an advantage by DODE administrators, the hoped-for outcomes of this inclusion—higher achievement and skillsets useful for employment and career—were uncertain. Even with advanced technology skills, the problematic job situation on the reservation hampers graduates' ability to succeed if they remain. One of the participants remarked that while the Navajo Council has made efforts to create opportunities, including building casinos, encouraging tourism, and developing resources in conjunction with outside corporations, there are yet few real prospects for Navajo youth graduating from high school, unless they go to college, which means leaving the reservation and potentially not returning. Another

respondent suggested that climate change leading to persistent drought, which can affect ranching and raising livestock, and the gradual drop in the use of fossil fuels have been detrimental to tribal efforts develop long term jobs, adding that these dynamics contribute to Diné youth dispersing away from the reservation. One administrator explained that constant pressure from outside the nation urges Diné youth to leave:

> Traditionally it was…the idea was more, get Indians off the reservations and we're going to integrate them into American society and that's the point of view that has always been a part of [the] school. Non- Navajos come here and they see nothing, and they say we've got to get these kids off the reservation, and they preach. "Get through high school so you can go to college, or so you can get off the reservation and get a job and buy something." That's been their discourse-- that's what they have told us. When I was in college, when I was in high school that was it: get off the reservation, there's nothing here for you, but at the same time I think that …when I taught in college there were Navajo students that said "I'm going back to the reservation." I know of a person who said his parents have this idea that he's going to work off the reservation somewhere, and become very successful, but for this person the reservation was extremely important-- being among his own people was extremely important… and so today he works on the reservation and he's highly trained but he said, "It's important for me to be here" and he is here.

One of the DODE officials described the efforts to develop relevant community college programs and scholarships, including courses created specifically for those who

wish to work in the casinos. This respondent reflected that the biggest employers in the Nation were the school districts and the hospitals, but that the positions offered were not often filled by Navajo graduates—whether this was due to a lack of interest, or perhaps a dearth of appropriate coursework at local colleges, was unknown. These issues complicate efforts to retain talent and bring full employment to Navajo youth, and are in essence counteracting the Nation's efforts to create a unified system within which their children can acquire the appropriate skills to survive in a 21st century world, while retaining intact their cultural heritage.

Marina's description of the curriculum at her school was brief, but she explained that while she struggled with math, she enjoyed it and her science courses the most, inasmuch as her ultimate goal had been to become a nurse. She also did not appear to be very cognizant of the programs such as Gear Up (National Council for Community and Education Partnerships website, n. d.) that are designed to encourage students to explore careers, or visit businesses on and off the reservation, although she did note that the school had offered career days. Marina felt that technology held an important role in education, including online courses, and felt empowered by the fact that she had taken keyboarding and computer courses. While she had left school before graduating, Marina expressed the desire to complete high school and obtain a high school equivalency diploma, mentioning that having open access to the internet would make that ambition more feasible.

The emphasis given to parent community involvement in education in NNSEA resembles the language of NCLB, except that the provisions outlined by the Navajo

Nation Council provides more latitude for local parent and community involvement in aspects where close cooperation between institution and community is essential. This includes a call for all stakeholders to work collaboratively to address the dropout rate and the needs of students who struggle to function within conventional school settings (p. 16)

In addition to collaborating to improve retention rates, local communities and parent groups were encouraged to assist in developing student conduct codes, while schools were asked to ensure that disciplinary measures be corrective and involve the student's parents (p. 16). The use of severe disciplinary measures including suspension or expulsion has been shown to create a negative atmosphere that influences student achievement even among those who have not been punished—a form of *collateral damage,* or unintended consequence to the surrounding population (Perry & Morris, 2014). In addition, the increasing trend toward strong disciplinary strategies since the 1990's, when being tough on crime was popularized, has exacerbated the achievement gap between minority students and Whites. There is a positive correlation between dropout and school suspensions, indicating that schools using expulsion as a disciplinary measure might be exacerbating the problems their students are already experiencing (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Morris & Perry, 2016, p. 70). The NNSEA emphasis on correction and parental and community involvement support the ideal of meeting student needs using supportive measures designed to ensure student retention.

Marina's experience with the disciplinary strategies used in the public high school she attended reflect these findings of correlations between severe institutional disciplinary methods, ineffectual parental involvement, and a lack of effective, *corrective*

interventions by the school. The story leading to Marina's eventual abandonment of her studies includes her parent's alcoholism and poverty, and the social stigma attached to these, which led her to gravitate toward peers engaged in high-risk behaviors. Noting that it was not her choice to drop out, Marina stated,

> Actually, I got kicked out because I hung out with people I wasn't supposed to hang out with at the time. I was so stressed out, because dealing with my home issues and problems I became a bad person. I didn't want my brother and sister to see what I became, because of how my mom, my dad was at that time. It was hard for me. My friends, who I thought was really my friends, got me kicked out.

Marina also recalled that she was bullied and tormented about her family status, which eventually led to fighting. When asked if the school had offered her a means for returning to the school and reintegrating with the student population, or a program to help her stay caught up while out of school, Marina responded that they had not, adding,

> No. They never offered me no program. My principal told me that I couldn't come back ever, but when I went over there to get my high school transcript, the lady went and told me ... I was talking to her and she told me I was supposed to return the next year, but my principal told me I couldn't return. It was just so confusing.

Although concerned, her parents did not provide the support Marina needed to re-engage with her studies, instead vacillating between their own needs and those of their daughter. Marina explained,

> My dad and my mom, they were still drinking at that time. Every time I would come home, they'd try to talk to me about my situation. My mom would always

> want me to stay home every day. She didn't want me to go back to school. It got harder and harder. We got taken away by CYFD, and got placed into another home. I was in a group home at that time too, and I couldn't go back to school.

This sequence of events provides examples of factors that push girls out of school and make it difficult for them to return. Marina had plans for her life that were interrupted by circumstances beyond her control and that she was incapable of correcting, despite her desire to do so. Wishing she had been able to prevent her expulsion and return to school, Marina blamed herself for making what she deemed poor choices, and spoke regretfully of missed opportunities:

> I would've graduated last year with my classmates. I thought about it, and I'd see myself up there, but I messed things up a long time ago. It was very hard on me. I wanted to finish school so that I could earn a diploma, so that I could get myself in to college. I had goals set for myself already of what I wanted to do later on in the future, but it didn't happen that way. I felt really bad about it. I was down. I was mad at myself because of what I'd done.

Marina's story highlights the need for public schools to reevaluate disciplinary protocols involving severe measures such as expulsion, and for instituting effective corrective measures such as those called for in the NNSEA that address bullying, involve parents, and protect the student's ability to complete their studies. Other strategies might include creating community outreach programs designed to help prevent the children of severely stressed families from falling between the cracks and disappearing. After her expulsion, Marina felt completely isolated and saw no recourse for reintegrating into the

system. While Marina's problem may have stemmed in part from her parent's lack of involvement, and poor communication between school and home, her experiences indicate the need to improve support systems. The NNSEA addressed this need for Navajo children, but as long as the Navajo Nation does not have full control of its school system, gaps such as those Marina experienced will persist.

The NNSEA's call for qualified teachers and safe, comfortable learning environments conducive to student achievement mirrors those of NCLB, except that the Navajo Council specified additional qualifications for staff to ensure the use of culturally appropriate instruction and methodologies. The act stated that school staff and teachers should be conversant with the Navajo culture and language , a concept supported by studies finding that students do better in school when their teachers share cultural and social ties with them (Dee, 2004). Teacher preparation programs across the United States, however, emphasize instructional practices aligned with standardization, and promote practices that implicitly support the federal government's assimilative objectives. Hayes and Juarez (2012) described this approach to teacher training as a concretization of *whiteness* within the system, implying that endorsing conventional American cultural perspectives as normative, devalues other cultures and experiences, and as such makes their cultivation in school tangential. The NNSEA call for Navajo preference and culturally knowledgeable education thus becomes a distinct counter-narrative to that of the federal government and a re-emphasis of the claim for sovereignty and autonomy in shaping the educational experience of Navajo children.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In Chapter 3, I noted several possible threats to validity, including contextual, where each participant's perspective is subject to misinterpretation, especially in a cross-cultural study. I addressed this by sending the transcripts to be reviewed by all of the participants, also inviting the administrators to evaluate my conclusions and provide feedback. In addition, I went over the interview responses with Marina to ensure she agreed with my notes. Only one of the administrators responded to the request, leaving some of the data open to potential misinterpretation. The second threat noted was that of a possible language barrier. While every participant was fluent in English, there were definite semantic and structural differences noted, which I addressed by using the original words and structures and providing complete quotes as much as possible. Finally, the problem of imposed constructs existed, which I addressed in part by clearly situating myself in this study and explaining my perspectives and assumptions about education. The interviewees' open responses to the questions enhanced and deepened the results, while the rich data gleaned from both the documentary analysis and interviews provided material that, when triangulated, not only supported many of the conclusions, but also offered avenues for further exploration and discovery.

Although this study focused on the story of a single individual, the details surrounding her experiences in and out of school, supplemented and confirmed by the information provided by the administrators, could represent the experiences of other Navajo girls in similar circumstances. The numerous intersections of data support a likelihood of transferability to many others in this population.

Social constructionism provided the theoretical framework for the study, especially focusing on the differences between Western and Indigenous perspectives, and the way individuals position themselves within situations and constructs, either self-selected or imposed. The question of why Navajo girls leave school was answered in part by the dichotomy between Western concepts of education and success, and the experiences of Indigenous youth whose life circumstances restrict their access to jobs and opportunities. Research has shown that a strong sense of ethnic identity enhances an individual's sense of self-esteem, and that this can result in increased academic achievement (Umana-Taylor, 2004; Whitesell, Mitchell, Spicer, & the Voices of Indian Teens Project, 2009). The Rock Point community school exemplified this dynamic, while Marina's conflicted home situation supported the DODE administrator's contention that Navajo youth are caught in the cultural identity crisis the tribe as a whole is experiencing, which may have had a negative influence on her ability to stay in school. The three narratives—federal, Navajo, and individual, reflect a different set of social constructions of reality rooted in different historical experiences, each contributing to the complexity and uncertainty of the situation confronting Navajo girls.

Summary

This policy analysis examined the strands of federal and state education discourse, the voice of the Navajo Nation, and schooling experiences of Navajo girls, in order to better understand the dynamics that contribute to the high dropout rate among these girls. The first step was to analyze federal education legislation to glean the stories of American politicians about education, and their policies to address the concerns they

expressed. Notably, the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk* encapsulated the post-World War II fear of a Soviet military and technological threat. This apprehension led various agencies to urge the government to address highly problematic areas in education, namely the absence of standards for high school graduation, a perceived lack of accountability, poorly developed math and science curricula, and a wide disparity between wealthy schools and those serving poor and minority populations. The ideal was to equalize education and create challenging standards that would result in high student achievement. The NCLB of 2001 (NCLB) reframed education to include strict accountability and equalizing access to good teachers, curricula and programs for the poor. The documentary analysis disaggregated the text of NCLB into its component conceptual domains and extracted the themes for each domain, which were then compartmentalized and evaluated to determine whether the assumptions they encapsulated were by experience and research.

The numerous problems that arose after implementing NCLB provided the impetus for refinements and developing a more collaborative approach to education, where the federal government would reward innovative ideas with extra funding and encourage stakeholders to share successful strategies. President Obama's Race to the Top initiative (2009) also introduced the idea of Common Core, a set of standards to eliminate the wide educational disparities that still existed. Analyzing RTT revealed that the narrative had shifted toward decentralization and granting states more autonomy. The paternal narrative had become more egalitarian.

Understanding the education narratives of the Navajo Nation involved a more complex approach. The first level document was the Navajo Nation Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005 (NNSEA), once again coded to reveal its primary conceptual domains, then distilled into themes revealing the implicit narratives. Additional, second level documents from the Navajo Council and the website of the Department of Diné Education (DODE) supported this analysis. Interviews with two DODE administrators added new insights and contexts within which to understand Navajo goals and objectives. I also interviewed a young woman who had left school before graduating, and triangulated her story with the data provided by the NNSEA and DODE administrators, as a means of deepening the analysis of the situation confronting young Navajo women navigating the educational system.

Chapter 5 includes a network analysis of the core education narratives of the federal government and Navajo Nation, disaggregating the components to discover their central premises. The objective was to clarify the manner in which the two sets of narratives polarize the discourse, and to delineate ways to diffuse this opposition through collaboration. In addition, Marina's story calls attention to the ways in which her needs have not been addressed, resulting in her inability to complete her high school diploma and continue her studies. Finally, the chapter proffers some suggestions to resolve the many conflicts arising from these two opposing narratives, with the ultimate goal of contributing in a positive way to the creation of a better, more unified, and appropriate educational environment for Navajo youth.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The central research question asked what elements contribute to the decision of a Navajo girl attending public high schools in the Navajo Nation to withdraw from her studies prior to graduating. In addition, the study considered the narratives that inform educational policies at the federal and tribal level, and the influence these might have in shaping the programs offered in schools within the Navajo Nation. The objective was to derive commonalities and divergences within the three sets of stories told--that of the federal government, the Navajo Nation, and a Navajo girl, and then locating the missing elements that would help answer the research questions. The obstacles encountered while trying to locate girls to participate in the study limited the scope of the inquiry. However, the sole interviewee provided useful information that correlated significantly with the data provided by the documentary analysis and administrative interviews.

Key Findings

This study drew from three distinct strands of data for analysis, including federal and Navajo education legislation and interviews with two Navajo education administrators, and the narrative inquiry of a Navajo woman who had dropped out of high school. Social constructionism provided a conceptual framework for explaining the imperatives that drove the narratives of either group, and for disaggregating divergent aspects within these themes that might be contributing to the disengagement and eventual dropping out of many Navajo girls. The history of both cultures offered insight into the stories that drove the way educational policy has been shaped and implemented, and an

analysis of the emerging themes clarified the way these stories have operationalized the primary conceptual domains of both groups.

Federal narratives

The ideologies of individualism, economic opportunity, and democracy offered a lens for viewing the way educational policies express federal priorities. While democratic governance promotes equal opportunity and equity, other forces, including capitalism and vestigial colonialism, also contribute to American educational paradigms. Table 8 demonstrates how these social constructs have helped shape many of the conceptual domains of NCLB and RTT.

Table 8

Federal Themes

Capitalism	• Competitive model, economic dominance • Education as pathway to career • Accountability/assessments: education as investment • Academic achievement: knowledge capital • Common Core/ standardization • STEM: technology as pathway to success • Productivity
Democratic governance	• Equity in education/funding • School improvement/reform • Local control, parental involvement
Post-colonialism	• Cultural assimilation • English proficiency as baseline skill

These strands merge to provide the structural basis for federal educational policy. As an example, the capitalist idea that technology is the pathway to financial success ties

to the democratic notion that all students should have access to an education that develops technological skillsets, and the post-colonial conviction that the best way to achieve this is to ensure that all students are proficient in English, considered the primary international language of science and technology. These premises apply in most subjects, creating a powerful argument that is difficult to disaggregate to uncover problematic aspects possibly leading to disengagement among different groups of students.

The analysis of NCLB and Race to the Top also revealed the patriarchal nature of the federal narrative and its roots in the report *A Nation at Risk* (1983). Patriarchy is a dualistic power dynamic where one group controls the mechanisms of power, regulating the quantity and quality of the other groups' access (Allan, 2010). A poststructuralist perspective, however, redirects the definition to one where implicit social constructs embracing this framework operate as its mechanisms—patriarchy infuses social discourse with its assumptions, so that all parties contribute to its maintenance and their own inherent subjection (Allan, 2010). Federal policy interweaves benevolence and protectiveness with clear directives for desired action and punitive outcomes for failure to meet established standards; the government thus adopts a fatherly role and the citizenry that of its children. Education legislation in this framework becomes the guidance that will increase student achievement and provide the United States with a highly productive and competitive workforce, outcomes important to the national interest.

A complicating factor within this dynamic is that the Constitution does not instill the government with the power to control education, obliging Congress to wield authority indirectly through allocations. Since NCLB, states complied to maintain their funding

status, although at times making cosmetic changes to meet adequate yearly progress criteria and avoid serious repercussions, such as school reorganization. Test scores and graduation rates have not risen to the level projected by the authors of NCLB, and 2014 did not mark the anticipated year when all students would meet state proficiency levels in core subjects (NCLB, 2002). As a reaction to this failure, President Obama's 2009 initiative Race to the Top adopted language to encourage states and districts to invent new strategies and share knowledge; by doing so, it loosened many of the accountability ties that bound schools to federal mandates, while sustaining the central authoritative narrative. The newly enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (2016) takes this divergence further by returning most accountability functions to the states, while preserving the standardization measures that theoretically promote educational equality among student populations (*ESSA-NCLB*, 2015).

In the case of indigent or immigrant children whose culture does not conform to that of White Euro-Americans, the patriarchal narrative became more problematic as NCLB attempted to address their needs while ensuring that its directives remained consistent. No Child Left Behind acknowledged the imperative for American Indian communities to preserve their cultural values and mother tongue, while inserting language that prevented public schools from prioritizing these topics or allowing them to interfere with objectives of English mastery and meeting state standards. Post-colonial assumptions emerged in language that granted a certain level of autonomy by allowing for tribally controlled schools and self-determination in developing curricula, but hampered these efforts with limited funding or competitive grant situations.

NCLB also reflected an attempt to modernize educational approaches by infusing its narratives with reductionist and positivist aspects, embracing empirical methods for measuring student achievement and teaching strategies, and developing standards designed to prepare students for college and career. Scientifically based research as a concept appeared throughout the legislation along with a reliance on quantitative studies, peer review, and clear-cut cause and effect correlations to ensure generalizable results. This turn toward a scientific basis for education was reflected in efforts to use psychometrics for assessing learning and a proclivity for standardization; Common Core continues this move away from child-centered education and toward a more mechanistic approach. The emphasis on introducing technology early in education aligns with these frameworks, although there is no consensus on its effectiveness in improving student achievement.

NCLB assigned parents, families, and communities the task of monitoring and evaluating schools and teachers, encouraging them to view education as a consumable product. NCLB required schools to issue performance reports, and encouraged parents to demand improvements if schools underperformed, or provided assistance should they decide to move their child to a different school. Since the only real means for parents and communities to determine a school's performance was through assessment data presented as school report cards, NCLB interwove parental involvement with standardization, diffusing critical examination of the way education is packaged, and magnifying the drift toward acceptance of the model it promoted.

Finally, the social justice aspects of NCLB and its corollary legislation focused on leveling the playing field between socioeconomic groups by targeting schools in poverty areas for additional funding and grants, in the hope that these would result in hiring better teachers and higher student achievement. Districts were encouraged to develop programs promoting literacy that would attract families to participate, provide online access for after school courses, and offer tutoring and remediation services. A great many of these were introduced during the years following the act's implementation, but their application so inconsistent that national target improvements were never met (Gamoran, 2013). The disparity between goals and achieved objectives for NCLB is not a clearly defined line, since it did have many successes and provided concrete guidelines heretofore missing in education legislation.

Navajo narratives

The inherent right to self-determination and its exercise provided the elemental framework of the Navajo Sovereignty in Education Act of 2005, manifested by numerous allusions to Navajo Law within the provisions. A primary aspect of the Navajo Council's claim to educational authority is its power sharing with the communities and people of the Navajo Nation, and emphasis on collaboration and consultation. An analogy for this model might be that of an orchestra conductor providing the leadership necessary for the musicians to work in harmony toward a mutually desired outcome. While NNSEA claimed the right to enforce its mandates, it did not establish detailed punitive outcomes similar to those in NCLB, but left the door open for local influences.

The needs of Navajo children was a primary theme of NNSEA, one that examined every aspect of a growing child's life and attempted to address each with suggestions for schools and communities. Healthy, invested families provide the basis for a child's intellectual and spiritual needs, and communities offer the support family units need to thrive. Learning environments must be safe, appropriate, and conducive to learning, and schools should develop excellent academic experiences and programs that will nurture the growing intellect of the child and provide the basis for a successful life, including a career. The developmental needs of different learners must be considered, whether the child be disabled or among the gifted and talented, and discipline should be corrective to ensure that students remain engaged in school until graduation.

Also emphasized within the NNSEA were the themes of Navajo language and culture, two synergetic aspects of a dynamic Diné society that preserves its traditions and way of life. The Navajo Council explicitly incorporated Diné law into its framework, and required Navajo schools to offer courses in Navajo government, language and culture. A number of community schools have successfully offered immersion programs for K-8, and demonstrated the effectiveness of using the heritage language as a teaching medium. Teacher qualifications were to include knowledge of Navajo culture and familiarity with the language, so classrooms become welcoming, appropriate, and safe learning environments for Navajo students, and their unique needs as a distinct group recognized.

The DODE enforces NNSEA mandates and supervises schools within the Navajo Nation. Addressing NNSEA criteria includes developing standards that touch on cultural and social studies aspects, creating an alternative assessment workbook (recently

approved by the federal government), developing a curriculum for general use, and cooperating with state and federal educational agencies on funding. The administrator interviews offered an in-depth perspective on what the DODE considers an appropriate education for Navajo students, and the troubling issues they are attempting to address, including the effects of standardized testing on Navajo children, the dearth of qualified teachers, and the gradual loss of culture occurring among the population. The administrators felt that schools should provide Navajo youth with a balanced education, so they are able to reintegrate into their home environment should they leave the reservation for work, but find they cannot thrive on the outside.

Finally, the narrative inquiry conducted with the sole female participant offered a glimpse into how these many tensions are affecting one young Navajo woman. Although she enjoyed her classes and felt that they would help her achieve her personal goals, her experience was marred by frequent moves, a difficult family situation where both parents were alcoholics, the expectation of sharing the responsibilities of raising her siblings, and unhappy interactions with her peers in school. The fact that her parents had differing perspectives on the appropriate engagement with Navajo traditions and language meant that she only spoke Navajo with one grandparent, participated randomly in ceremonies, and did not understand their importance or meaning. High-risk behaviors and fighting resulted in harsh disciplinary measures, and she left high school early, never to return. Poor communication between school and her family and her lack of awareness of possible outreach programs contributed to her decision to stay away, although she has made an effort to earn a high school equivalency certification since leaving. This young

woman's narrative contributed rich, highly relevant detail that provided insight into the many elements contributing to the drop out problem among Navajo girls.

Interpretation of the Findings

NPA (Roe, 1994) strategies identified the problems and solutions outlined by the federal government, the Navajo Council, and the study participants, with the goal of offering some direction for resolving an uncertain and apparently intractable situation confronting many Navajo students. The primary research question asked about the elements that contribute to the inability of a Navajo girl to remain in school until graduation. When queried as to why some Navajo girls drop out of high school, Marina, the young participant I spoke with, articulated a simple response: "They have problems in their lives…it's really hard sometimes. They just figure going to school is a waste of time, so they stop going. There's nothing there for them." In this, Marina revealed another important piece to the list--the seeming irrelevance of an education or diploma—which adds complexity and uncertainty to the situation. Even as the federal government and the Navajo Nation devise programs to address poor student performance and high dropout rates, their efforts will be ineffectual if they do not reach consensus on the causes, many embedded in a web of cultural, geographic, and socio-economic factors. Conspicuously, also, the focus to date has been whether these young people are achieving within the American paradigm of what constitutes success along with assumptions of shared values, expectations that might not convince sections of the population whose participation in the system is marginal and who might not envision ever becoming fully vested.

Roe (1994) asserted that policy analysis is generally preoccupied with evaluating results rather than what motivates policy creation. In narrative analysis, however, motivation is a critical component since it directs policy construction; the difficulty is uncovering these intentions and understanding the perceived problems that the policy seeks to solve. I used a modified network analysis to disaggregate the implicit problems each policy addresses and determine whether a network of problem statements exists, that is useful for locating convergences between those of the federal government and the Navajo Council. The same approach revealed the problem pathways exposed by DODE administrators, as well as Marina, the young study participant.

NCLB modified the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by applying strict accountability standards and increasing government intervention in education. This analysis has already revealed that these changes were rooted in preoccupation with economic and strategic competitiveness and the need to graduate highly skilled and productive students. The prescriptive language and detailed proposals of the legislation addressed how this was to occur. A disaggregation of the primary themes within the five paramount conceptual domains revealed these recommendations and their underlying concerns (Appendix I). Distilling these exposed recurring themes that provided a baseline framework. The topics were, in descending order,

- Management problems (f=11) (addressing student needs in a timely manner, inadequate staff training and professional development programs, public unfamiliarity with the system and the role of parent and community in education,

a dearth of quality teachers and materials for poor and minority students, funding not consistently tied to program effectiveness),

- The importance of uniformity in curricula, assessments, and materials as well as universal access to education (*f* =6),
- The critical nature of high quality teachers and resources *(F=6)*, the need for accountability on all levels of education (*f* =5),
- The significance of utilizing reliable, scientific methodologies and measures (*f* =3), and the value of ensuring that curricula, assessments, and standards are aligned to improve connectivity and ultimately,
- Student achievement (*f* =2).

While other aspects of NCLB developed subthemes that clarified foci on civics, economics, math, science, foreign languages and technology, the central concerns underwrote all of these.

NNSEA analysis revealed different troubling issues unique to the educational circumstances of Diné children and the agencies serving them (Appendix J). Subjects classified as laying the groundwork (*f* =11) focused on broadly defined yet important aspects of education, including establishing educational agencies and creating foundations for funding, as well as a framework for higher education. Other items in this area included the need to ensure school board members are fully versed in their duties and responsibilities under the law, school attendance problems, prioritizing Navajo studies, quality curriculum materials and assessment protocols, and advising education agencies of the central role parents play in their children's education. This includes

keeping abreast of their child's situation in school, and participating in creating school conduct guidelines as well as Navajo studies course content. Finally, the Act emphasized the importance of the survival of the Navajo language and culture.

Management problems (f=9) uncovered within the legislation included creating a means of enforcing Navajo laws in the area of education, guidelines for managing land leased for educational facilities, and intra and inter-agency communication of legislative mandates regarding education. In addition to these concerns, NNSEA urged developing a means for assessing school environments across the Navajo Nation, solving the issues created by frequent student transfers between schools, ensuring that school personnel are well versed in Navajo language and culture, and hiring qualified experts to lead educational program development.

Child-centered education was a key feature of NNSEA (f=6), with mentions of holistic evaluations, positive and caring approaches to discipline that involve parents from the very outset, reducing the stress created by long bus rides and difficult living circumstances, and staff and teachers with whom children feel comfortable, who speak their language and are familiar with their culture. Tied to this concept of centering the child in the educational experience, NNSEA looked at learning environments (f=5), including problems caused by counseling services not tailored to the students they serve, and the range of abilities to be considered when creating programs, to ensure all children are receiving appropriate coursework and resources. This list is not all-inclusive, but relates many of the most consistently replayed themes, indicating an emphasis on addressing the unique needs of Navajo children, whether these be environmental or

cultural. The inventory also highlights the very real urgency the Navajo Council placed on ensuring the preservation and generational transmission of Diné language and culture.

Disaggregating the interviews of DODE officials into problem statements revealed a close correlation between the concerns addressed by the NNSEA and agency personnel (Table 9). Inasmuch as these individuals are tasked with carrying out the Council's mandates, their experience places them with daily opportunities to observe the dichotomies created by a school system dedicated to promoting federal narratives even as these fail to resonate with many students and deepen the rift between the endeavors of educators and those whom they serve.

Table 9

Disaggregated Problem Statements of DODE Administrators

Cultural loss tied to loss of original Diné sacred lands
Western education is precipitating an identity crisis as students compare themselves to Anglo students
Unfamiliarity with own culture, history, and government can impede full participation in community and create a sense of alienation
Western tests and curriculum can prevent Navajo students from developing a sense of personal identity and purpose
Students are given academic counseling but need holistic approaches that recognize and integrate Navajo way of life, culture and tradition as well
The importance of ethnic identity in developing well balanced individuals has not been emphasized enough in Western education
Fundamentals of Navajo culture are disappearing
There is a deepening rift between those who have become assimilated and those holding to their Navajo values and traditions
The importance of the Navajo language to the coherence of Diné culture is not well understood across the nation, and some resistance to learning or teaching the language exists.
Government educational mandates are not aligned with Navajo needs
Too many federal road blocks prevent the Navajo from creating an educational system suited to their children's needs (funding, approvals, differing agendas)

Uncovering potential causal relationships between these assertions involved re-aggregating the problem statements into categories, which then revealed commonalities and the most frequently identified issues, as well as possible causative connections (Roe, 1994). Table 10 shows the results of this re-aggregation.

Table 10

Frequency Table Created from Problem Statements

Educational Mismatch (6)	Identity Crisis (5)
Western education is precipitating an identity crisis as students compare themselves to Anglo students	Cultural loss tied to loss of original Diné sacred lands
Western tests and curriculum can prevent Navajo students from developing a sense of personal identity and purpose	Unfamiliarity with own culture, history, and government can impede full participation in community and create a sense of alienation
Students are given academic counseling but need holistic approaches that recognize and integrate Navajo way of life, culture and tradition as well	Fundamentals of Navajo culture are disappearing
The importance of ethnic identity in developing well balanced individuals has not been emphasized enough in Western education	There is a deepening rift between those who have become assimilated and those holding to their Navajo values and tradition
Government educational mandates are not aligned with Navajo needs	The importance of the Navajo language to the coherence of Diné culture is not well understood across the nation, and some resistance to learning or teaching the language exists
Too many federal road blocks prevent the Navajo from creating an educational system suited to their children's needs (funding, approvals, differing agendas)	

Network analysis showed a clear correlation between the two domains of educational mismatch and identity crisis, although this correlation is not necessarily *causal,* except indirectly. For example, Western education mandates and expectations do

not align with the emotional, social, cultural and physical needs of Navajo children, which can contribute to their sense of uncertainty about which aspect of their persona to prioritize-- the Diné, or the Westernized self that attempts to fit into the dominant culture. Unfamiliar with their own language, culture, and values, many cannot comfortably transition between the two worlds. The federal government, focused on creating a standardized, mechanical way of teaching and measuring progress, is not overly concerned with the correlation between ethnic identity and self-efficacy, even though it can make a significant difference in academic achievement. The existential crisis of the tribe as language, culture, and traditional ways of life erode due to the persistent presence of Westernization magnifies the challenge, as families grapple with the dilemma of whether to return to and nurture the traditional, or encourage their children to cast it aside to survive in an ever-changing world. Finally, these challenges to the integrity of the Diné as a distinct people take a back seat to federal educational priorities, which in many cases reflect post-colonial emphases on mastering English as a pathway to success within the system, and dismissing cultural precedence in favor of academic success within a narrow set of parameters. In essence, both sets of stances contribute to a complex, uncertain, and polarizing situation (Roe, 1994), making resolution difficult.

The final contribution to these problem statements comes from Marina's interview. The unique aspect of this data is that Marina has experienced the very conflicts revealed within the documentary analysis and administrative interviews, in addition to unstated problems that weighed heavily in her ultimate disengagement from education. Each of Marina's problems (see Table 11) finds its origin in one delineated by the

administrators, creating a causal pathway. As an example of this correlation, the identity crisis many Navajo confront at the adult level influences the way they approach ceremony and the value of speaking Navajo. For Diné children, this can lead to uncertainty about the significance of tradition, discontinuity in observance, a poor mastery of Navajo beyond basic colloquialism, and a sense of disorientation about the reason for sustaining culture. Had Marina received appropriate, culturally and socially sensitive counseling at school that acknowledged these difficulties, and had the school implemented the NNSEA mandate to engage parents in disciplinary matters, Marina's story might have turned out differently.

Table 11

Problem Statements Disaggregated from Marina's Interview

Projected nursing career but little guidance for achieving objectives/milestones
Unfamiliarity with significance of ceremonies,
Conflicted home environment due to father's lack of interest in traditional culture, learning Navajo
Parent's alcoholism and inability to parent children
Parent's inability to sustain employment or stable home life
Parents inability to engage meaningfully in educational environment/obstacles/discipline
Responsibilities at home interfering with academic progress
Social environment at school tense due to family situation
Overly harsh discipline, no outreach to bring student back into school

This analysis examined separately the federal government's priorities and the difficulties addressed by the NNSEA and DODE administrators, revealing such complexity and ambiguity that any real resolution remains elusive. Clearly, one of the primary obstacles is an almost insurmountable dichotomy created by two governments

with differing narratives and agendas, and the power imbalance created by the fact that one has established dominance and that this entity has become tone deaf to the concerns of those depending on it for funding and support. Federal education discourse has generally centered on statistics of academic success including graduation rates and test scores, as well as analyses of teacher qualifications, curricula and standards, accountability measures and consequences.

Alternately, the Navajo Council has sought to develop policies that address the needs of Navajo children and families, aligned with the desire to retain the Diné way of life and heritage language. Enmeshed within these ideals, however, is the reality that Navajo children need to acquire the skills necessary for survival in a 21st century economy, hence a good education becomes ever more critical. A metaphorical double helix illustrates these positions, where occasional bridges linking the two sets exist, such as the common desire to see children succeed academically. The parallel nature of this double helix, however, eliminates the likelihood of a "dominant causal pathway" that, when addressed, will resolve the difficulties confronting Navajo children (Roe, 1994, p.160). Instead, these two sets of narratives retain their inherent validity and must coexist simultaneously unless profound changes occur in the relationship between federal, state and tribal governments, a possibility that the new ESSA (2016) might engender.

Every complex, uncertain situation that seems to defy resolution contains a hidden reality that has not been addressed (Roe, 1994). When this evidence emerges, it offers a new perspective that can facilitate developing innovative solutions, or might encourage revisiting existing solutions abandoned due to their experimental status or perhaps an

assumption of limited applicability. The narratives of the federal government and Navajo Nation, although different, have at least one commonality: both institute a framework for creating a pathway for education. The stories both parties tell conclude with students prepared for the future, skilled in modern approaches including familiarity with technology, and tracking toward higher education and careers. The DODE participants also reflected these objectives, although they emphasized the need to incorporate emotional and spiritual aspects to ensure that graduates are well adjusted, have good critical thinking skills, and are conversant with their culture and language so they can function in and out of the Navajo Nation. Finally, Marina expressed her own enjoyment of the educational experience, her desire to pursue a nursing career, and her hope for a future return, supporting the narrative thread of education as purposeful activity designed to produce specific, useful results.

The unspoken reality must reveal itself as something other than the given premises contained within the aforementioned narratives. As discussed in the literature review, numerous studies have tried to pinpoint possible causes for dropout, including poverty, discrimination, difficult life circumstances pushing students out of the educational environment, cultural differences between school and student, geography, disability, and parental engagement (Battin-Pearson et.al., 2000; Jordan, Kostandini, & Mykerezi, 2012; Tavakolian & Howell, 2012). It can be argued, however, that the variety of possible factors itself points to the absence of definite causal pathways; the task then becomes to seek that which is unspoken and unexamined, but which might provide a direction for policymakers. A clue comes from Marina's assertion that Navajo girls leave

high school because they do not consider what they are learning to be relevant to their lives; this absence of meaningfulness provides a basis for developing new approaches, as student ownership and engagement are critical factors in academic achievement. Both stem from the way students envision learning and its ultimate purpose.

Studies have demonstrated that the task of creating meaning involves making connections and seeing possible correlations; this activity not only helps individuals make sense of their everyday experiences, but also assists them when confronting stressful events and circumstances (Beaumeister, 1991; Park, 2010). The *cognitive frameworks* people develop over time help them to orient themselves within a variety of contexts, as long as these align with their internal order (Park, 2010, p. 257). If this reconcilement becomes difficult, a process of deliberately trying to resolve the differences and recreate that equilibrium occurs which, if successful, reduces the stress of the original dissonance (Park, 2010). To put it simply, if we can make sense of what is happening, we are better able to adjust to it, as long as the process occurs within a reasonable amount of time and with relatively little uncertainty. When the route from doubt and confusion to resolution is lengthy and difficult, however, distress rises and well-being diminishes (Park, 2010). For many Navajo students, the difference between the reality of their everyday lives and the hypothetical positive outcomes of graduating from high school might present too great a cognitive barrier to overcome. The labor becomes meaningless if the goal is out of reach, or impossible to imagine, given their daily life experience.

The concept of engagement is closely correlated to meaningfulness in education, and can range from minimal (just doing the work required, generally apathetic) to fully being absorbed, excited, and self-directed (Lee, 2003). A sense of competency, value, self-determination, and interest are critical components of engagement in school; if these are not generated in elementary school, there is little likelihood that they will carry through to secondary, where the environment is more impersonal and the curriculum more demanding (Lee, 2003). The addition of high stakes testing without considerable investment in supplemental resources and consistent support can defeat the objective of higher achievement and reduce engagement if students lose their sense of competency (Lee, 2003). This concept is supported by the administrative participant's claim that standardized testing can infuse a sense of inadequacy in children whose frames of reference and background knowledge differs considerably from those of mainstream students living off the reservation.

Four aspects to engagement work together during learning activities, namely behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and agentic; all connect to motivation, the dynamic that incentivizes students to engage in a process (Reeve, 2012). The least studied aspect is *agentic engagement,* where the student in essence takes control of the learning situation on a personal level and molds it according to their own perspectives and desired outcomes; this expands subject mastery, helps them integrate the material into their cognitive frameworks, and drives them to further their exposure to learning experiences (Reeve, 2012). Feelings of self-determination can influence motivation and achievement; when a student has a sense of control over her own learning, she becomes more engaged

and is more motivated to continue, elevating her sense of competence (Reeve, 2012). While teachers can create the environment and strategies to help students become engaged, this cycle is inherently an internal process, with autonomy as a key component (Reeve, 2012).

Meaningfulness, or an "alignment of the object-motives contained in the curriculum with the identity-mediated motives of the students" heavily influences motivation (Wardekker, Boersma, Ten Dam, & Volman, 2011, p. 166). Not being able to relate the material to one's life in any meaningful way, or not having the requisite skillset or background knowledge to participate fully in an activity or process can negatively influence levels of engagement (p. 166). This means that students must know what objectives they are trying to accomplish, and the reasons for such; if they feel confident that these are achievable and desirable, they are more likely to invest in the process. Bundick (2010) wrote about the need to ensure that students are not simply *succeeding* in school (a goal of the federal government, indicated by assessment scores), but are also *thriving,* that is, demonstrating the positive indicators of "self-confidence, optimism, purpose in life, [and] school success" (p. 57). To accomplish this subjective state, Bundick suggested that the activities adolescents engage in must be important to them at some level. Unfortunately, Bundick's research also showed that societal and cultural norms influence the way adolescents perceive the value of certain activities and can reduce their significance, even though they could serve as optimal outlets for creativity and self-fulfillment. Hence, the arts are not as valued as career paths as are science, math and technology, so the intrinsic rewards for devoting time and effort into developing

skills in those areas may not be as great as they might be in a society that deems these pursuits to be important (p. 70). This might also be true of cultural studies relevant to the Diné, when placed in a public school environment focused on academic success as defined by federal statutes.

The association between meaningfulness, engagement and motivation in student achievement is important for understanding why some adolescents remain in school while others leave before graduating. A fourth important consideration is that of *well-being,* or being healthy and generally content, interested in one's surroundings and other people, and alert (Miller, 2011). Feelings of well-being can originate in any number of circumstances and are not contextually limited; for students, however, there are conditions that might hinder their ability to develop this sense, including a difficult family life, poverty, and discrimination. Work place studies have demonstrated a strong correlation between meaningful work, engagement, and well-being, so that when individuals feel that their work is significant and relevant to their lives, their absenteeism levels drop and they experience higher levels of well-being (Soane et al., 2013). Transferring these findings to a school environment offers the opportunity to construct a converse premise suggesting that *students living in difficult or stressful environments who do not feel that the work they are doing in school is significant or meaningful, will generally not be happy, interested or alert, will not engage, and will avoid participating in the processes.* Drop out and high absenteeism thus become a natural consequence of the failure to provide learning environments where these students can feel purposefully engaged and invested.

The results appear to indicate that while government entities construct educational frameworks that will provide students with learning environments and resources designed to help them reach predetermined goals and objectives, they might be overlooking a fundamental aspect of academic success: ensuring that students invest in these programs. The helix consisting of the of parallel narratives of government and tribe is unified by the narrative of students whose personal desires, ambitions, interests, and self-determination are a critical component, but have yet to be incorporated meaningfully. Evidently, this does not apply in all situations or contexts; the academic success rates of White students integrated into mainstream American society is different from that of students living in culturally distinct regions, such as Native American reservations, or in predominantly ethnic areas as found in many urban environments (Aud, Fox, & Kewal-Ramani, 2010).

The Navajo Council appears to have implicitly recognized the potential existence of this concept and its implications, and included language in NNSEA that acknowledges the necessity of considering the unique requirements of Navajo students when developing curricula and standards. The challenge will be developing strategies that directly address the needs of the portion of the student population who have disengaged from academics and see little relevance in participating, or for whom the difficulties of returning appear insurmountable. These approaches should be useful in other settings as well, for increasing student engagement and investment and reducing dropout and low participation.

Limitations of the Study

This study encountered a number of obstacles during implementation, the primary being the apparent reluctance of young Navajo girls to participate and tell their stories. While the communities were helpful and offered many suggestions for recruitment, I had little success and was obligated to change the original parameters of the inquiry to include only the voice of the sole participant. While the results might be transferable to other groups within the Navajo Nation, this study does not claim to represent the voices of all Diné girls who drop out of high school.

In addition to this, the administrator interviews were extremely time-constrained, and I was not able to cover all of the questions in the protocol, limiting the depth of the analysis to the topics covered. I only analyzed some of the education materials utilized by the Navajo tribe, which constrained the breadth to documents available online on the DODE site. I do not in any way claim to represent the views of the Diné people but only provide an analysis of documents and interviews placed within the framework of a narrative policy analysis. Finally, as each American Indian tribe is culturally unique, this study is not necessarily applicable in any other context.

Recommendations

In this study I tried to answer the research question of why many Navajo girls abandon their studies and has explored the education narratives of the federal government and Navajo Nation for answers. The selected legislative pieces outlined important guidelines, framed within the domains of student achievement and government responsibilities, but offered no specifics for addressing this problem other than

recommending programs to prevent dropout and funding to support these. The interviews were more insightful, as they provided a closer look at the difficulties experienced by Navajo families and students, as well as the tribe in general, which could affect student retention. Marina's contribution provided a personal perspective that allowed triangulation with that of the administrators and the Navajo Council. The missing strand turned out to be student engagement, a concept irrevocably linked to meaningfulness and relevance that research has shown to have a profound impact on a student's desire to stay in school. What students want, how they would choose to accomplish their goals, and what structures must be designed to assist this process are questions that remain largely unanswered.

It would seem impossible to legislate engagement, which is an abstract and subjective quality that characterizes students who enjoy the learning process and see value in acquiring the skillsets they learn. While one study of middle school Navajo students explored the relationship between learning environments and engagement (McKinnon, 2008), there is no comparable research examining how dominant narratives of the purpose of education affect engagement among Navajo students. Education in the United States uses a hierarchical model, where the student receives important knowledge from trained professionals. This construct does not yield easily to participatory student input or shifts toward horizontality. Interdisciplinary or constructivist approaches provide an alternative although they mostly operate within the same constructs of ensuring students acquire skills to become productive workers in a competitive economic environment. International examples of education policies focused on inclusiveness,

collaboration, and processes that engage parents and communities in developing curricula and learning environment, can provide guidance for policymakers, especially at the state and local levels (Pietarinen, Phyalto, & Soini, 2017). Research examining how institutions for higher education foster student engagement could provide strategies for secondary school environments, including the deliberate inclusion of student voices in decision making processes, and assisting minority students increase their presence by providing contexts within which they can initiate and practice self-direction and choice (Zepke & Leach, 2010).

The Navajo premise of community participation and consultation offers an alternative with a proven record of success. The Rock Point community school has demonstrated over time its effectiveness in developing programs that successfully incorporate cultural priorities, community participation, and modernity. One DODE administrator noted that graduates were distinguishable by their evident self-confidence, their ability to navigate the divide between Navajo and Anglo cultures, their fluency in Navajo, and their familiarity with Navajo culture. Schools operated by other distinct indigenous groups globally have found similar success by incorporating community perspectives when developing programs, rather than relying on the dominant culture for direction (Wardekker, Boersma, Dam, & Volman, 2011). In these contexts, the value of learning resides within its applicability, and collaboration toward mutually important goals assists students in developing a sense of competency, self-direction, and achievement. Meaningfulness serves the dual function of meeting objectives of imparting needed skillsets and providing youth with the sense that they set the parameters within

which the voyage shall take place, and that the learned skills will be applicable in diverse settings (p. 162).

Indigenous peoples establishing their own educational priorities and pathways challenge established social constructs on education based on Western ideologies, infusing a sense of self-direction and legitimacy that can empower communities and foster increased engagement in students. Berger and Luckmann (1966) suggested that institutionalizing ideas legitimizes them and gives them permanence; policies that acknowledge the right of tribal authorities to direct appropriate learning settings and coursework for native children can open a door for converting schools. The newly enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (2016) is a step toward this outcome, as it requires affected schools to consult with tribes prior to submitting applications for programs, and to provide them with explanations about their decisions (Whalen, 2016).

This study provided a glimpse into an important missing component in education that might negatively influence school retention among Navajo girls, but is only a beginning, as it has not examined the inclusion of family in education. Federal legislation describes the role of parents as monitors only periodically consulted. The NNSEA, however, vastly broadens their role and integrates parental input into developing culturally relevant courses, student conduct codes, and disciplinary actions. The effect of deep parental engagement in education and the value of community input when developing programs designed to promote student engagement are topics to investigate. The question of how much variety can a system tolerate before losing integrity is

important, hence education agencies tasked to increase engagement by decreasing constraints will have to determine limitations.

Implications

This study contributes to the evolving research on developing appropriate programs and educational settings for Native American students that will improve their chances of achieving academic success and remain in school. An in-depth analysis of the legislative pieces and interviews with Navajo participants provided data indicating the need to introduce some critical ideas.

- Student ownership and self-direction in the educational process appeared to be an important but missing element in the discourse. Participatory structures fostering empowerment can encourage engagement, especially when individuals can set their own direction. While Marina enjoyed many aspects of school, she ultimately was powerless in deciding her own educational path and eventual fate, diminishing her voice and reinforcing a social construction of invisibility.
- If students feel that their studies are relevant and meaningful, and their goals achievable, they will be more motivated to persist until graduation. This implies the need for a shift in focus from national interests to those of the individual and reintroducing local voices into the discourse on best practices.
- The process of creating programs that will foster engagement should include parents and communities, as they offer immediate opportunities to apply learned skills and receive continuous feedback. This can contribute to shifting the political

dynamics that render minority populations invisible and enhance their ability to participate in the discourse that determines education policy.

- Positive social change can derive from prioritizing educational settings that demonstrably offer students opportunities to use their voice as they practice self-determination, and direct their studies toward outcomes they value. Government entities can encourage these by funding community-based programs and training teachers to develop course content that encourages this autonomous development.

Studies have repeatedly shown that when girls complete their education, they are more likely to have healthy families, contribute to their family income, and promote literacy and academic success in their children (Greenberger et al., 2007; Klugman et al., 2014). In addition, educated women are more apt to engage in political processes and create positive changes beginning at the local level (Greenberger et al., 2007). Social construction implications include resituating women and girls as central to community wellbeing and providing pathways to egalitarian sharing of power and resources. While there is global movement in that direction, societal norms have not shifted enough to ensure these outcomes.

The difficulties confronting this population of students, including poverty and in some cases dysfunctional families are compounded by school environments that focus on assessments and coursework directed toward supporting a federal narrative, allowing little or no opportunity for individual students to select pathways that are relevant to their lives, or encourage them to co-create their educational programs. When asked how schools could create environments more suited to girls who struggle in school, Marina

was unable to respond, as the concept of choice and autonomy were not within her realm of experience. For Marina and other American Indian girls who have left school behind, there would be great value in initiating a conversation that was directed at learning what they want to see happen in their education, and asking them to participate in creating a school environment that would attract and retain them.

Summary

Education is the bedrock of human society: it transmits information from generation to generation, and grants access to the accumulated knowledge of humanity. While this truism is generally accepted, the manner in which education is perceived and transmitted varies widely. In the United States, the shift from local to government control in education was gradual until the late 20th century, when education became associated with national interests, shifting toward a centralized model. This transference, designed to improve American education, was in response to a government report outlining how American test scores in specific disciplines compared unfavorably to those of other industrialized nations. A survey of scores and rankings since NCLB, however, shows that United States rankings in the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) test have only risen marginally and remain far below those of other advanced economies (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2003; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2016). In addition, while dropout rates have improved, there has been little change in the number of students abandoning their studies among minority groups, indicating the need to re-examine educational approaches. The newly enacted 2016 Every Student Succeeds Act continues many of the centralization

aspects of NCLB while allowing for more state autonomy in determining course content and standards (ESSA-NCLB, 2015).

The guidelines and funding mechanisms of the federal government support a narrative that correlates high test scores in specific core areas with success, and focus on reforming the way schools operate to achieve these objectives. The guiding principles of the Navajo Council, however, direct attention to the communities, families, and individuals engaged in the educational process, and provide a more holistic approach that maintains high standards but reflects their cultural values and way of life. The challenges that confront the Navajo Nation, culturally and economically, added to federal and state mandates on education, contribute to the difficulty of developing programs suited to the evolving needs of Navajo children.

This study focused on the stories of Navajo girls who have not completed their studies, in an effort to understand how government narratives might be influencing their desire, or ability to complete high school. While only relating one account, the interview revealed a young person navigating a complex environment with few survival strategies or prospects. Marina's story revealed how one individual's experience reflects the malaise of a distinct culture enduring constant external pressures to dissolve, and the way these tensions influence her ability to develop a distinct ethnic identity or sense of personal autonomy. Instead, factors beyond her control pushed and pulled Marina out of school; although she expressed the desire to return and complete her high school equivalency diploma, after several years she still had not finalized the process.

While the narrative policy analysis provided data indicating the need to focus more strategically on ensuring students become engaged in their own education, this is not a clear-cut and simple solution, but imbued with uncertainty due to the absence of this conceptual framework in American education, except on a localized basis. The Navajo Nation has established a direction that can accommodate this principle if they find it useful for improving student success. The fact that DODE administrators emphasized the need to provide Navajo students with a sense of personal direction, good critical thinking skills, and the ability to navigate both the Western world and their home environment confirms this study's results. The educational environment in the United States is rapidly changing, as political priorities shift; the stories of these Navajo girls, however, will continue to indicate the need to address their sense of irrelevance and to help them overcome the numerous obstacles they confront as they attempt to complete their education.

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Appendix A: Arizona 2013 4-year Cohort Graduation Rates in Navajo Nation Public High Schools

School	Cohort *Total/ Percentage graduating*	Males *Total in cohort*	Male graduates *Total/ Percentage*	Females *Total in cohort*	Female graduates *Total/ Percentage*
Chinle	295 .56	151	77 .51	145	88 .61
Ganado	130 .57	57	32 .56	77	43 .56
Window Rock	167 .81	81	55 .68	92	83 .90
Monument Valley	193 .72	107	71 .66	92	71 .77
Tuba City	164 .65	88	56 .64	79	54 .68
Red Mesa	51 .59	28	19 .68	25	11 .44
Pinion	126 .64	64	37 .58	65	46 .71
Red Valley/Cove	30 .73	21	18 .86	Not available	Not available
Valley	76 .62	44	25 .57	39	27 .69

(table continues)

Tuba City Alt	26	Not available	19	7 .37 .42
White Cone	12	Not available	Not available	.33

Note. 2013 4-year cohort graduation rates calculated for Arizona public high schools within the borders of the Navajo Nation. The 2013 cohort consists of students who enrolled in the 9th grade in 2008-2009, the 10th grade in 2009-2010, and the 12th grade in 2011-2012. Percentages are approximations as some schools report students of other races not disaggregated if numbers are fewer than 11 (*Graduation Rate,* 2014; "School Directory," n. d.)

Appendix B: New Mexico 2013 4-year Cohort Graduation Rate for Navajo Nation Public Schools

School	Graduation percentage
Kirtland	.75
Newcomb	.61
Shiprock	.64
Crownpoint	.83
Tse'Yi'Gai	.71
Navajo Pine	.68
Ramah	.92
Thoreau	.78
Tohatchi	.74

Note. 2013 4-year cohort graduation rate for New Mexico public high schools situated within the borders of the Navajo Nation. Data not disaggregated by race or gender (New Mexico Public Education Department [NMPED], 2014; "School Directory," n. d.).

Appendix C: Utah 2013 4-year Cohort Graduation Rate for Navajo Nation Public Schools

School	Graduation percentage
Monument Valley	.73
Navajo Mountain	Not available
Whitehorse	.80

Note. 4-year cohort graduation rate for Utah public high schools situated within the borders of the Navajo Nation. Data not disaggregated by race or gender (Utah State Office of Education [USOE], 2013; "School Directory." n. d.).

Appendix D: Database and Key Terms

Database	Key terms
Academic Search Complete	American Indian and education Girls and depression and academic Girls and education Indigenous education Social constructivism theory School engagement and girls
Education Research Complete	American Indian and education American Indian and student Dropout Education environment Ethnic identity Ethnic identity and academic achievement Ethnic identity and adolescence Heritage language and education Markstrom Resilience and poverty
ERIC	Education and policy Education and purpose Native American and student School environments
Google Scholar	American Indian education American Indian policy Bureau of Indian Education Federal Indian policy Heritage language and education Native American policy Native American education
Political Science Complete	School environment and minorities Social constructivism theory Social construction Social construction and minorities Social constructionism and policy Social constructionism and policy and American Indians

	Trade and Intercourse Act 1790 Tribal sovereignty United Nations and indigenous
ProQuest	
	American Indian and education Federal and Indian and education and policy High school and dropout and Native American or American Indian
PsycINFO	
	Academic achievement and American Indian Ethnic identity and academic achievement American Indian and student
Sage Premier	
	American Indian and assimilation Colonialism Education and assimilation Stereotypes and academic achievement
SocINDEX	
	Education and purpose Education and policy and United States Social constructivism theory Social construction Social construction and minorities Social constructionism and policy Social constructionism and policy and American Indians

Appendix E: Interview Protocol Navajo Girls

Script

Before we start, I would like to go over a few important details about your participation in this study. This interview is part of an inquiry into the reasons why Navajo girls drop out of high school, which is useful information for the schools and the Navajo Nation, as well as federal and state governments. The insights you have to share are important, and this will give you the opportunity to comment about your experiences. To protect your privacy, your name or the name of your high school will not appear in the study. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to, and you can stop this conversation and leave at any time. You will have the opportunity to review your answers once I have typed the transcript. If you feel I have misunderstood something, or misinterpreted it, feel free to correct me. If you would feel more comfortable with a family member in the room with us, please let me know.

The purpose of this interview is to understand some of the reasons that made you decide to drop out of high school, and your feelings about the courses and programs offered at the school. Another area I would like to talk about is how you feel about education in general, and how it fits into your life. I have written down some questions to get the conversation started, but feel free to talk about anything that comes to mind that would help me understand your thoughts and point of view about school and why you left.

Questions for the students

1. Let's talk first about your school experience in general. What are some of the things you remember that stand out the most about being in school?
    - Biggest challenges
    - Atmosphere
    - Safety
    - Fun/interests/sports/friends
2. What were some of your favorite subjects? Why?
3. What subjects did you struggle with the most? Why?
4. How did you feel about the tests you had to take at school?
5. What were some of the most meaningful and useful activities offered at the school? What made them interesting to you?
    - Which activities seemed to be the biggest waste of time? Why?
6. How many of the after school and extracurricular programs at the high school did you know about?
    - If you participated in some, can you describe them, and what you learned from them?
    - If you decided not to participate, why not?
7. How different was the school environment from your home life? How did you feel about going to school every day?
    - How did you manage the shifts from home to school?
    - What was your biggest struggle?

8. Please tell me about your decision to drop out of high school.
    - How much time was involved in your decision?
    - What conversations did you have, and with whom, about this decision?
    - What feelings were you having while you were deciding?
    - What could have changed your mind?
9. What did having a diploma mean to you before you left? How do you feel about it now?
10. Why do families send their children to school?
11. What are your goals in life?
12. How did going to school influence the way you felt about yourself?
13. Is there anything you would like to talk about that I have not asked?

Appendix F: Interview Protocol Navajo Nation Department of Diné Education Administrators

Script

Before we start, I would like to go over a few important details about your participation in this study. This interview is part of an inquiry into the reasons why Navajo girls drop out of high school, and the efforts of the Navajo Nation to develop standards, assessment measures, and outcomes that better reflect their perspectives on how Navajo children should be educated, and the purposes of education. To protect your privacy, your name will not appear in the study unless you specifically request that I include it. Because of the importance of your official position within the government structure and the influence your work has upon eventual outcomes, I would ask for permission to include your official title and the name of the department you head. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to, and you can stop this conversation at any time.

You will have the opportunity to review your answers once I have typed the transcript. The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board will receive a copy of all the transcripts this study generates. If you feel I have misunderstood something, or misinterpreted it during the interview, please feel free to correct me. If after reviewing the transcript you would like to change an answer, please advise me of these alterations.

Questions for Department of Diné Education administrators

1. What is a good education?
    - Purpose
    - Skills
    - Strategies
    - Values
2. What would be the ideal educational situation for Navajo children?
    - Schedules
    - Environment
    - Curriculum (critical coursework)
    - Community involvement
    - Extracurricular activities
    - Career planning
    - What are the primary obstacles to achieving this ideal?
3. What is the role of education in Navajo life?
4. What are some fundamental differences between NCLB goals and objectives and those of the Navajo Nation?
    - Technology
    - Economics
    - Productivity
5. What is the proper role of standardized testing in an educational program?
    - What are its benefits, drawbacks?

- How does the Navajo Nation intend to measure achievement if it implements culturally relevant curricula? How important is it that these conform to NCLB criteria?

6. What are some of the reasons Navajo students drop out of high school?
7. What are effective strategies for countering this problem?
    - What are some obstacles to implementing these strategies?
8. Is there any other area you would like to address that I have not mentioned?

Appendix G: Codebook

The effect of education narratives on high school persistence among Navajo girls

Name	Description	Sources	References
Academic achievement		1	2
Accountability		1	6
Assessments		1	2
Adult Education		1	3
Attendance		1	5
Career education	This is an interesting way of describing how the Navajo view the role of a career.	1	5
Purpose of education		1	3
Challenges in class		0	0
Children's needs		1	19
CN Appropriate cultural experiences		1	1
CN Community involvement		1	3
CN Developmental needs	Includes medical and social	1	2
CN family viability	Children need to be living in healthy homes with strong families	1	2
CN Quality academic programs		1	5
CN Safety and Learning environments		1	8

CN As an evolving framework		0	0
CN Culture as curriculum or mandatory programs		0	0
Competence, compassion		1	2
Cooperative arrangements	Between programs, schools, the NN and other government entities etc.	1	3
Culture	So here, not just the mention of culture but also its role, meaning, centrality.	1	17
CN Culture as an important part of an individual's persona		1	3
CN Cultural knowledge as a qualification for office or a position	Steeped in the culture--able to relate it to others, living within traditional values so that they are recognizable to others and maybe inspire them	1	6
CN Culture and language intrinsically tied together		1	1
CN Culture as required coursework for Navajo students		1	4
CN Cultural education as a sovereign right	Instruction to consolidate the cultural instruction of the 3 states with that of the Navajo Nation to ensure uniformity and accuracy.	0	0
CN Definition of culture with subsets		1	1
Curriculum		1	10
Character development		1	2
CN Career		1	1

education and practical skills			
CN Language and culture	Objective to integrate the 3 states curriculum with that espoused by the Navajo Nation in the areas of language and culture	1	3
CN Reflects Navajo student needs	Scrutinizing criteria and materials to ensure appropriateness.	1	2
CN Standards and subjects aligned with federal and state		1	1
Dine' College		0	0
Education mismatch problems		0	0
Educational mismatch		1	6
Financial aid students and family loan type thing		1	5
Identity crisis		1	6
Inherent authority		0	0
Navajo Nation commitment to education		1	5
Sovereignty	Navajo Nation claims of authority	1	6
Learning environment		1	7
CN Analysing to eliminate negative factors		1	1
CN Designed for optimal development		1	3
CN Navajo Nation and community authority		1	2

Cn Safe and appropriate school facilities and environments	Buildings	1	5
Management problems		0	0
Monitoring responsibilities		1	4
Writing policies			
Implementing			
Navajo identity crisis		0	0
Navajo Language		1	13
As a critical component for survival of Dine' people as distinct culture		1	5
CN Cultural sensitivity		1	1
CN Making Navaho language and culture studies a priority		1	10
Immersion and primary means of instruction		1	2
Navajo Nation laws	This node represents statements that include the mention of specific laws implemented by the Navajo Nation that may or may not be congruent with those of the Federal or State government	1	26
CN Authoritative	Phrasing that provides support for the notion of the ultimate authority of the Navajo Nation Council to establish law and enforce it.	1	17
CN Enforcement	Calls for agencies and individuals to enforce Navajo Nation laws. Implications of due diligence as well	1	5

	as collaborative efforts. Looking to the Navajo Nation for the final word on what constitutes legal procedures		
Collaborative, consultative processes	This node deals with the language speaking to discussion, developing new policies, and assigning tasks for development, and consulting with affected parties.	1	10
Navajo preference	Explanation for preference etc.	1	2
Parents and family and communities	Responsibilities, roles, and recipients of information to make good decisions	1	15
CN Parents as active participants in decision making		1	12
CN Responsibility to children		1	3
School and program improvement		1	1
School boards	Local and BIA	1	2
Standards		1	5
Teachers		1	6
CN Appropriate teachers for student needs		1	5

Nodes\\ NCLB nodes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Connectivity	Assessments, curricula, and standards have not been consistently aligned	1	2
Management problems		1	11
Measurability	Avoiding approaches and materials that have not been measurable and quantifiable	1	3
Need for		1	5

accountability			
Quality	Raising standards of quality to address low level, inadequate curricula, assessments, outcomes.	1	6
Universality	Objective is to standardize and universalize for consistency	1	6

Nodes\\ NCLB nodes\\ NNSEA nodes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Holistic and healthy education		1	6
Laying the groundwork		1	11
Learning environments	Includes staffing	1	5
Management problems	Includes developing programs and managing staff issues	1	9

Nodes\\Interview nodes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Attempts to provide those desirable careers	This is where the tribe has run into a wall of not being able to entice the students to stay who are successful because of the sparsity of local jobs.	0	0
Culture	The factors that relate centrally to sustaining culture, the aspects that contribute to losing the richness of culture	1	3
Education as preparation for life		2	7
ability to return to reservation or community		1	1
Education for success and career		2	3
Education to learn critical thinking		1	1

Maintaining ties with community		2	8
Ethnic identity	The presence of a person who is confident in their own ethnic identity and places him or herself in the world	2	5
Generational misunderstandings or perspectives	How the youth and the older generations see things differently as far as priorities go, and their eventual position in American society or even the global society.	1	2
Language purposes	The values of language. There is considerable discussion of the ways in which language is used, and the purpose of language when discussing Navajo.	1	4
Duality and contradictions about preserving the language		1	3
Efforts to preserve Navajo	Opposing view of the "Navajo as archaic" perspective	2	5
Narrative on non-Navajo versus Navajo	Ties into the assimilated mind concept, the stories that are told the Navajo youth in public schools that becomes a systemic narrative and influences their attitude toward staying. Good place to comment about value systems.	2	4
CN Intra-tribal disconnect		1	2
Holding on to traditional values and ways		1	6
Navajo culture	The traditional aspect and the shift to modernity	2	6
Navajo experience with government mandates		1	7
CN Attempts to maintain sovereignty		1	2

Navajo as dying language		1	7
NCLB	Direction/purposes/outcomes of directives	2	7
Purpose of education	What are the things that the federal government feels are important versus the Tribe: technology, English proficiency, economic education, STEM	1	2
Economics of the Navajo Nation the reality	This is tied into the reason why Navajos face high unemployment and they feel a need to be pragmatic about the education they give their children as far as a modern economy goes	2	10
Seamless transitions	The ability to move from one lifestyle or living environment to the other without suffering ill effects, especially the choice to do so, based on having requisite skills to live in both worlds.	2	2
Student needs	What do the students need versus what to teachers/administrators look for	1	3
CN Discouraged students		1	4
CN Parental or family engagement		1	1
Unmet needs	Consequences of today's educational picture	1	4
Teacher training		1	1
technology as opportunity		1	2
Technology	How do the Navajo view the emphasis on technology?	2	5

Nodes\\Interview nodes\\Marina Nodes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Academic challenges		2	3
Assessments		1	2

Career related comments		3	3
Community involvement in education		1	1
Coursework		2	3
Culture and language		2	2
Language comments		2	6
Non-traditional		1	1
Traditional		2	4
Family influence on schooling		2	3
Positive activities		1	1
Problems	Attendance, illness, misunderstanding	1	2
Dropout		2	3
Family involvement in dropout		3	3
Home environment		1	4
School environment		2	4
Self-direction		1	1
Social interactions at school		2	5
Personal reflections		3	4
Teacher interactions		2	3

Nodes\\New codes NCLB
First broad theme coding run through NCLB

Name	Description	Sources	References
Academic achievement		1	118
CN Equity	Providing educational environments	1	22

	for the disadvantaged to ensure equitable access to education		
CN Expectations	State and federal expectations of sufficient academic achievement	1	40
CN Graduation	Academic achievement as measured by completion of program/graduation	1	2
CN Improving	Steps to be taken to improve AA	1	46
CN Proficiency	As measured by assessments	1	15
CN Remediation	Activities to remediate areas where AA is limited	1	2
Accountability	NCLB concept	1	95
CN Account As a principle		1	16
CN Account Consequences		1	25
CN Account Measures to ensure		1	58
Adequate yearly Progress		1	45
CN AYP Assessments	Using assessments to determine AYP	1	4
CN AYP Determinations and Consequences		1	22
CN AYP Meeting AYP goals		1	13
CN AYP Parent Options		1	2
CN AYP Strategies for remediation		1	3
Advanced placement		1	5
CN AP Benefits		1	1
CN AP State		1	1
CN AP strategies		1	3

Assessments	NCLB	1	130
CN Assess Aligned with standards		1	9
CN Assess AYP		1	10
CN Assess Measure improvement		1	12
CN Assess Quality and function		1	36
CN Assess Reporting results		1	9
CN Assess Standardized tests	specific references to reason for and use of	1	15
CN Assess Student populations		1	32
Business or employment references		1	46
CN Bus Desirable traits for businesses		1	6
CN Bus Partnerships assessments, current develop		1	1
CN Bus training and mentoring	Career, opportunities	1	26
CN Bus Vocational training	Delinquent, low income, minority, LEP, females	1	14
Challenging academic standards	NCLB	1	102
Additional CAS references		1	1
CN CAS Aligned with assessments	Assessments should be designed to measure student achievement in CAS	1	7
CN CAS At risk students		1	15

CN CAS Desirable objective		1	36
CN CAS English proficiency and	The level to which English proficiency is seen as enabling a student to meet proficiency level in CAS	1	18
CN CAS School improvement		1	13
CN CAS Teachers qualifications		1	13
Civics government and citizenship		1	8
Economics references		1	11
Dropout		1	10
CN Dropout Encourage students		1	2
CN Dropout School programs prevent		1	2
CN Dropout targeted populations		1	7
English acquisition or proficiency		1	65
CN English Prof Purpose of funding and programs		1	15
CN English Prof Identifying LEP		1	3
CN English Prof Language Instruction programs		1	11
CN English Prof Measuring Results		1	6
CN English Prof Parental or Family		1	4

involvement			
Partnerships	teacher training, entities, non-profits engaged in assisting districts in teaching LEP students or providing teacher training	1	10
Extracurricular programs	Vocational, dropout prevention, literacy outreach	1	32
CN Extra Curr. At risk populations		1	15
CN Extra Curr. CAS		1	3
CN Extra Curr. Enrichment		1	7
CN Extra Prog. Literacy		1	9
Girls		1	8
CN Girls inequity		1	5
CN Girls opportunities		1	3
Immigrant children references		1	8
Local authority over curriculum and program development		1	4
CN LA Best suited to establish programs		1	2
CN LA Peer review		1	1
Low income references	Poverty, low income, disadvantaged	1	56
CN Low Inc. Eligible for services		1	22
Cn Low Inc. Families		1	4
CN Low Inc. Perc in student pop served by schools		1	28
Math and or science references		1	15

CN Math and Science partnerships	Created to encourage/support/fund additional math, engineering/science training	1	7
CN Math and Science Technology		1	44
CN Math and Science Teacher training and cert		1	13
Measurement and technical references	References to established measurement tools, statistics etc.	1	69
CN Measurement Reliability		1	6
CN Measurement Technical assistance for school improvement and program implementation		1	35
CN Meas. Uses		1	24
Native American or Alaska native		1	20
BIA references		1	13
Cultural references		1	22
Native language references		1	10
Parental involvement		1	84
Cn Par In. Notification		1	18
CN Par. In. Choice		1	3
CN Par. In. Participation		1	66
School improvement		1	44
CN Funding		1	10
CN Coursework		1	1
Cn Programs		1	6

CN Strategies and requirements	1	23
Scientifically Based Research	1	79
CN SBR Curriculum and programs	1	10
CN SBR Professional development	1	8
CN SBR Research	1	34
CN SBR School and Academic achievement improve	1	9
CN SBR Technical assistance	1	3
CN Scientific BR Instruction	1	15
Teacher qualifications	1	114
CN TQ Financial incentives	1	4
CN TQ Highly Qualified	1	12
CN TQ Paraprofessionals	1	5
CN TQ Professional development	1	87

Nodes\\RTT

Name	Description	Sources	References
4 areas of RTT		1	1
assessments		1	12
CN formative assessments		1	4
CN Higher order thinking skills,		1	1

critical thinking			
CN Monitoring progress in classroom	observation	1	1
CN Outcome data	Value added	1	1
CN refine assessment practices	Eliminate end of year cumulative, other standardized tests that do not accurately reflect student learning	1	8
Challenging standards		1	8
CN creating curriculum to support new standards		1	2
CN Standards aligned with college and career		1	8
Cn Standards similar across states		1	4
change		1	7
Communication	New ways to exchange information	1	7
CN Communication at the administrative and state levels		1	5
CN Paradigm shift toward collaboration	Listening to feedback	1	5
Competitive		1	4
Collaboration and transparency		1	35
CN Collaboration SEA Districts LEA		1	16
CN collaboration to		1	3

help lower performing schools		
CN Collaboration with DoE	1	3
CN collaboration with partners such as businesses universities etc.	1	2
Cn collaboration within districts to improve teaching	1	5
Cn Transparency to encourage communication	1	5
Economy economic security	1	7
Effective teachers	1	31
CN Evaluating teachers in new ways	1	11
CN Incentives for teachers and rewards	1	2
CN Professional training	1	9
CN Supporting teachers within school or district	1	7
CN teachers supporting each other	1	3
Funding	1	2
Global competitive economy	1	3

Improve outcomes		1	10
Incentives		1	1
Innovate		1	11
Opportunity		1	3
Poverty disadvantage		1	3
School improvement		1	11
Student achievement		1	2
Successes		1	1
Technology and data		1	26
CN technology for evaluation		1	1
CN technology for information dissemination		1	12
CN technology for professional training		1	1
CN Technology to enhance instruction		1	6

Nodes\\RTT\\NN codes

Name	Description	Sources	References
Educational goals of the NN		1	2
Career education		1	1
Culture		1	5
Curriculum		1	3
Family		1	4
Healthy development	Psycho social adjustment	1	2

Inherent authority		1	8
Federal and state responsibilities	Based on treaty and trust relationship	1	1
Jurisdictional limitations		1	1
Learning environment	Positive/healthy	1	4
Achievement standards		1	3
Navajo Language		1	7
Navajo language as instrument for learning		1	3

Appendix H: NNHRRB Memorandum of Approval

THE NAVAJO NATION

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT
JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

February 23, 2016

Nancy C. Carre
Walden University
P.O. Box 364
Clark Fork, ID 83811

Dear Ms. Carre,

This is to advise you that the **Study #NNR-15.229T: "The Effect of Educational Narratives on High School Persistence among Navajo Girls"** has been presented to the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board (NNHRRB) on **February 16, 2016**, and the following action taken subject to the conditions and explanation provided below.

On Agenda For:	Procedure
Reasons:	New Application
Description:	Request Review and Acceptance of New Protocol
NNHRRB Action:	**Accepted and Approved, February 16, 2016 – February 16, 2017**
Conditions:	With All Standard Conditions

The Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board has added a very important additional contingency regarding failure to comply with NNHRRB rules, regulations, and submittal of reports which could result in sanctions being placed against your project. This could also affect your funding source and the principal investigator. Under Part Five: Certification, please note paragraph five wherein it states: *"I agree not to proceed in the research until the problems have been resolved or the Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board has reviewed and approved the changes."* Therefore, it is very important to submit quarterly and annual reports on time and if continuation is warranted submit a letter of request sixty (60) days prior to the expiration date.

The following are requirements that apply to all research studies:

1. The Navajo Nation retains ownership of all data obtained within its territorial boundaries. The Principal Investigator shall submit to the NNHRRB a plan and timeline on how and when the data/statistics will be turned over to the Navajo Nation;
2. Only the approved informed consent document(s) will be used in the study;
3. Any proposed future changes to the protocol or the consent form(s) must again be submitted to the Board for review and approval prior to implementation of the proposed change;
4. If the results of the study will be published or used for oral presentations at professional conferences, the proposed publication, abstract and/or presentation materials must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board review and prior approval;
5. Upon Board approval, three (3) copies of the final publication must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program;
6. All manuscripts must be submitted to the Navajo Research Program for Board Review and prior approval;
7. The Principal Investigator must submit a dissemination plan on how the results of the study and how these results will be reported back to the Navajo Nation;

8. The Principal Investigator must share specifically how these results will generally benefit or improve the health of the Navajo people. This can be completed by:
    a. Conducting an educational in-service for the community people and health care providers on the Navajo Nation and present the findings. Provide documentation of these in-services presented.
    b. Developing educational materials for use by the health care providers and the community people and providing the training on how to use the materials; and
    c. Presenting and sharing the results of the study at a research conference sponsored by the Navajo Nation for its health care providers and the Navajo people.
9. The Principal Investigator is expected to submit documentation on 8a, b, & c;
10. The Principal Investigator must submit quarterly and annual reports as scheduled.

Please begin using Protocol Number **NNR-15.229** on all correspondences. If you have any questions on this subject, please call the Navajo Research Program at (928) 871-6929.

Sincerely Yours,

Beverly Becenti-Pigman, Chairperson
Navajo Nation Human Research Review Board

cc: *#NNR-15.229 file*

Appendix I: Problems addressed derived from NCLB conceptual domains utilizing primary themes

The Role of Assessments

Assessment quality and purpose	Problems addressed
Assessment to diagnose problems and improve student achievement Quality, validity, reliability critical. Collaboration w/providers, evaluators, universities called for Must be regularly scheduled Designed to evaluate and improve academic achievement Mandated LEA results to be compared DOI must approve assessments for AI /AN populations Must be tied to curriculum Based on Scientifically based research Used in preschools Used as indicator of progress and program quality Measure effectiveness of multiple levels of instruction Tied to challenging academic standards Part of multifaceted instructional approach Teacher/staff training in use critical To be fair, accurate, non-discriminatory States accountable on multiple levels, issue reports.	Quality and consistency of tests has been inadequate Frequency has been inadequate Have not been universally required or applied AI/AN tribal authorities not able to assess quality without DOI input Assessments have not been scientifically based Assessments and curriculum, standards have not been consistently linked States and LEAs have not been held accountable

Academic Achievement as Objective

Improving academic achievement	Problems addressed
Diagnosing obstacles to academic achievement critical	Academic achievement must be measured and quantified
Multiple factors affecting AA	Inadequate staff training prevents AA
Strategies to improve AA	Strategies to improve AA must be tied to AYP/funding accountability
Additional assistance for struggling students	Standards not adequately challenging
Allocating resources to programs designed to increase AA	
Staff training and evaluations	
AYP and AA	
Collaboration on successful strategies	
Funding based on evidence of effective strategies	
Challenging standards	
Learning environments	
Engaging parents and communities	

Improving Teacher Quality

Professional development	Problems addressed
Professional development linked to academic achievement Professional development for diagnosing reading levels Professional development providers must be high quality Professional development training to be based on scientifically based research Preschool professional development Professional development for librarians and technicians States accountable for providing cost effective, high quality professional development Professional development critical to encourage STEM studies Networking among professional development providers/recipients important Professional development critical for: LEP, technology, civics, foreign languages, economics, entrepreneurship, crisis intervention, gender equity, physical education, technology, math, science Telecommunications, internet important to professional development Regular evaluations and professional development Mentoring aspect of professional development	Professional development has been inadequate Provider quality has been uneven Emphasis on professional development for targeted courses Broad access to professional development impeded by dearth of technology-related resources Accountability and effectiveness to be addressed with evaluations (programs, teachers)

Desirable objectives	Problems addressed
Assess to improving teaching, learning, accountability to ensure students can meet CAS CAS supported by content rich curricula Assign 2 levels of achievement: Proficient,/Advanced to measure progress Basic level of achievement for students not meeting P/A Collaborate with other states to establish CAS Provide timely assistance for students not meeting P/A levels CAS based on scientifically based research Comprehensive approaches to improve schools so student can meet CAS Parents and families critical for helping students achieve CAS Design programs and services to support students so can meet CAS Create rigorous math and science courses aligned with CAS to prepare students for college Integrate technology to support student achievement in meeting CAS Translate materials into Native languages to help students meet CAS Smaller learning communities to help students meet CAS Develop video programs aligned with CAS LEAs, teachers, agencies, organizations to meet AI/AN cultural needs so they can meet CAS AI preschool/family programs to support learning so children can meet CAS	Assessments and accountability needed to ensure schools are aligning curricula with CAS Progress difficult to assess without specific measurable targets Some states lack resources/capability of creating CAS/curricula Struggling students' needs are not addressed in a timely manner SBR only appropriate foundation for CAS Math, science, technology must be special focus Technology supports CAS AI/AN students must meet CAS (equality) Cultural differences must be overcome so AI/AN can meet CAS (equity) Early intervention needed AI/AN to ensure children will eventually meet CAS

Accountability to Ensure Success

Desirable objectives	Problems addressed
School improvement is a priority, accountability measures support this goal Grant applications should indicate broad community support garnered through consultation and collaboration among affected groups States should adopt a unified accountability system based on academic standards and achievement, including sanctions and rewards Applications for grant renewals should demonstrate significant and continuous progress in acad. achievement among affected students States to create baselines from which to measure improvement, goals, and timelines States to create annual objectives and minimum allowable percentage of students demonstrating proficiency Diagnostic and final reports to be made public, on a regular basis, to be used by LEAs to improve student achievement Schools required to adopt curricula and assessments aligned with state standards Schools must ensure poor and minority students have equal access to good teachers and curricula States must issue clear explanations of accountability criteria and methodologies Parents to be advised of individual teacher qualifications BIA schools held to same accountability standards as other schools Justify programs serving AI students by proving tribal membership of recipients Demonstrate effectiveness of programs including science/math/technology/teacher recruiting and retention AYP for programs serving LEP populations Delineate consequences for not meeting AYP	Schools have not demonstrated adequate improvement over time Public unaware of schools' performance/need to improve Reliability of accountability measures is insufficient Lack of uniformity has created unequal results, harming students Poor/minority students have not received high quality teaching/materials Parents uninformed about accountability measures and teacher qualifications BIA schools and programs must be held accountable for programs serving AI students Funding to be based on program effectiveness AYP a central measure of progress, consequences and rewards will ensure its effectiveness

Appendix J: Problems addressed derived from NNSEA conceptual domains utilizing primary themes

Navajo Nation as Sovereign Entity

Authority	Problems addressed
Grants specific authority and outlines duties of Board of Education Grants specific authority and outlines duties of Department of Diné Education Mandates school attendance, punitive consequences for parental failure to comply, grants local boards authority to develop programs to improve attendance Enforces federal AYP mandates as well as those implemented by the Navajo Nation Delegates limited powers to local and community school boards(LSB) to enforce policies Mandates LSB to uphold child abuse/neglect laws Defines eligibility requirements for positions on LS Mandates LEA compliance with Navajo Nation education laws and state/federal requirements Details lease requirements for lands used for educational facilities	Agencies tasked with creating and upholding education laws needed School attendance is problematic School improvements needed School boards need guidance as to duties/responsibilities under Navajo law Need specific rules for managing lands used for educational facilities Use focused language to inform schools of mandate to follow NN, state, and federal requirements Need to create a community college designed to meet the needs of Diné

Children's Needs as Priority

Safety and learning environments	Problems addressed
Monitor educational environments and situations of Navajo students Use holistic, comprehensive approach to evaluate learning environments and situations Ensure all ability levels are addressed and all students served appropriately Provide individually tailored, culturally sensitive and comprehensive counseling services to students Minimize school transfers and their potentially detrimental effects Use positive approaches to combat alcohol and drug abuse to help students overcome dependency and remain in school Address excessively long bus commutes and ensure students have every opportunity to attend school Mandated prevention, treatment, reporting of child abuse and neglect/careful employee screening	Educational environments across the nation are disparate and need consistent evaluation Evaluations must not be superficial or focused on only one aspect of the learning experience All student abilities might not be served appropriately (LD to Gifted and Talented) Counseling services might not be effective due to non-comprehensive or culturally inappropriate approaches The effect of frequent school transfers needs to be addressed Punitive approaches to high risk behaviors can negatively influence student persistence and achievement Long bus rides can influence student attendance and achievement Preventing child neglect and abuse is imperative

The Critical Importance of Culture

Cultural preservation	Problems addressed
Schools respect child and family's cultural background Navajo language as vehicle for transmission and preservation of Navajo culture Two Board members to be acknowledged experts in Navajo culture Navajo Board of Education (NBE) to direct the development and merging of language and culture standards and testing instruments, curricula and teaching materials for the states and schools serving the Navajo Nation NBE directs procedures and standards for endorsing Navajo cultural programs and certifying instructional personnel Curricula must teach Navajo culture and language along with English and American culture, meet the needs and cultural values of students and be aligned with high academic standards Learning Navajo language and culture a critical part of retaining cultural distinctness and sovereignty All personnel to receive instruction on Navajo culture awareness and sensitivity All Navajo students regardless of ability level to receive appropriate learning environments and resources that respect their individual culture, learning styles, and background Counselors to be knowledgeable in Navajo culture and be capable of relating this to the student's life and family background Preference for Navajo personnel or those with demonstrated knowledge of Navajo culture Dedicated effort to recruit and train Navajo teachers and instructors	Possible barriers created by school personnel's lack of understanding of student cultural values and traditions NBE tasks require high level of experience, background and knowledge of Navajo culture Quality curricula , materials, and assessment materials integrating Navajo language and culture are needed Culture and language studies are critical to the survival of the Navajo people as a distinct culture Personnel working with children may not have adequate background in culture and tradition Students of different ability levels might not receive appropriate instruction respectful of their distinct needs There is a need for qualified Navajo teachers and staff that must be addressed with programs and hiring practices.

The Role of Parents, Families, and Communities

Parents, families and community as active participants	Problems addressed
Parental role as the foremost educators of their children involves engagement in all aspects of their child's development, including school Public access to Board meetings The public needs access to government and agency reports and data on education Parents invited to be involved in determining course content for Navajo culture element of school curricula Parents to be consulted and engaged in: creating student conduct codes, any discipline involving their child, creating programs to reduce dropout, absenteeism, and help struggling students stay in school School board meetings should be accessible to the public, especially parents Schools and parents to jointly develop written parental involvement policies	Parental role must be asserted unequivocally to education agencies Parents might not be aware of decisions being made that could affect their child's educational experience Course content richness and relevance might be influenced by a narrow focus or incomplete coverage Parents might not know or understand how schools arrive at their discipline policies, or be engaged in the way their child is disciplined

The Role of the Navajo Language

Navajo language and culture studies as priorities	Problems addressed
Fluency in Navajo is critical for the survival of the Navajo nation as a distinct group and must be taught in all of its complexity	It is not sufficient to speak the language colloquially, it must be taught as a subject including grammar, lexicon etc.
The Diné language must be taught from early childhood to ensure that children are fluent and that it becomes their primary tongue	Relegating Navajo to second language status diminishes its role as primary cultural transmitter
Uniformity in teaching Navajo, establishing standards and testing criteria is critical	Without standards and assessment criteria, Navajo instruction will not be uniform or effective for the Nation as a whole
All schools and school systems operating with the borders of the Navajo nation must include Navajo language studies in their curricula	The best learning environments include that children be provided role models and staff with whom they have cultural and linguistic commonalities
Teaching staff and school personnel should be familiar with or fluent in Navajo to help ensure suitable learning environments for Navajo children	